



CULTIVATING SUSPICION

An Ethnography

Leah Davina Junck



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Preface

This ethnography is based on lengthy fieldwork and explores how people deal with suspicion and navigate fears of crime in a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa. Against this backdrop, it grapples with the question of how the local Neighbourhood Watch, as a recently revived institution, operates. An analysis of the institution and relationships within and around it revealed that relationality (through corporeal encounters and digital connections) serves as an alternative source of trust to the state in combating crime and its wider impact on lived sociality in the suburb and, likely, beyond. The focus of this book lies in understanding the strategies people habitually employ in order to create a sense of security in a context where the anticipation of violence permeates various everyday routines. In exploring strategies of living through insecurities, besides taking note of blatant material security measures such as patrol cars and barbed wires, the body as a site of social and political memory and struggle and the roles it takes on in the face of perceived precariousness serves as the main focus of attention. The book seeks to offer an insight into how the body becomes an instrument or buffer in dealing with insecurity and crime vulnerability. The quality of public life, it will become clear, is compromised through embodied strategies to engage with the fear of crime and a particular kind of 'suspect'. Therefore, it queries around the capacity of an anticipation of criminal violence in shaping individual and institutional bodies and strategies that will be zoomed into. It is currently practice with related studies of crime in South Africa to aim at identifying the roots of crime. This piece of writing rather attempts to illuminate how the constant possibility of crime is engaged with and thus moves away from a fixed victim-perpetrator dichotomy that has dominated the public discourse.

Abbreviations

ASA	Anthropology Southern Africa
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Front
GPS	Global Positioning System
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
NW	Neighbourhood Watch
OCA	Observatory Civic Association
Obsid	Observatory Improvement District
ONW	Observatory Neighbourhood Watch
OPF	Observatory Police Forum
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
Sanef	SA National Editors' Forum
SAPS	South African Police Service
SPCA	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SWEAT	Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce

Introduction

1.1. The making of bodies, places and spaces in Observatory

On the 4th of September 2015, four uniformed members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) kicked a man who was lying on the pavement after he had dropped his pistol and was unarmed. Still, the police officers fatally shot him at close range¹. The man was identified as a criminal suspect. He was carrying a pistol and had, allegedly, attempted a robbery. After he was defenceless on the ground with no considerable risk emanating from him in the presence of the police officers, the violence against the man took on a different meaning, hinting at the complex and embodied associations attached to danger and crime in South Africa. The incident is reminiscent of the bitter aftertastes souring public palates after a series of cases of police brutality in the recent past. During what has come to be known as the Marikana massacre, 34 mine workers were shot dead by the SAPS on the 25-year anniversary of a nation-wide miner's strike in 2012. The dreadful event has become synonymous with the difficult relationships between civilians and the very institution that is meant to distribute a sense of security amongst them.

Such incidents are pervasive and the memorability of their consequent aftertastes also become apparent in a report by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (Ipid)², showing that 57% of deaths resulting from police action are due to police

¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/africa-police-filmed-shooting-unarmed-suspect-dead-151102192137128.html>

² http://pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/IPID_Annual_Reports_Annual_Reports_201617CD_File.pdf.

brutality. Members of the SAPS were also found to have been involved in 51 rape incidents, 61 torture incidents, 66 corruption cases and 159 other criminal cases in 2017. New events of police brutality captured on camera can be found on YouTube under captions such as ‘police brutality hits again’. It is clear that they cannot be interpreted as isolated occurrences. The SAPS reportedly being twice as deadly as their North American counterparts must also be interpreted against the fact that they are six times more likely to die on duty in comparison. While this likelihood is noteworthy and may lead to more violent reactions in unwarranted cases to protect their own lives, it does not account for the reported cases of rape, torture and corruption in 2017.

A lack of faith in the ability of the state to offer protection to its citizens is evidenced in South Africa being the fourth largest private security industry in the world with a large part of it being consumer driven³ and exceeding spending on both, the country’s police and army⁴. Even though private security is a costly investment, security guards are only paid between R3000-5000 (approximately \$145-360) per month.

A fear of crime and intrusion becomes quite apparent when looking at the amount of money invested in fencing, wiring and equipping buildings, people and areas with appliances and accessories that are marketed as facilitating safety (and that are largely taxed and thus highly profitable for the state when promoted and sold). As additional contributions to security are often still not deemed to be sufficient, local Neighbourhood Watch groups consisting of ordinary citizens are not unusual, especially in the more affluent South African suburbs. It is also noteworthy that security strategies do not always take the visible shape of security installations and Neighbourhood Watch

³ <http://www.702.co.za/articles/260253/sa-has-the-fourth-largest-private-security-industry-in-the-world-security-expert>.

⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/08/business/south-africa-private-security/>

patrollers in the streets with their bibs and two-way radios. New technologies and media feed more subtly into the profitable trend of wrapping oneself into a layer of security mechanisms and forces in South Africa. Through a constant sharing of crime stories and pictures of ‘suspects’ on social media platforms, fear becomes continuously perpetuated and recycled.

Practices of fencing off houses and communities, the employment of private security guards and the networking of communities in watching, finding and, ideally, criminally charging individuals classified as ‘suspicious’ by them are drastic expressions of complicated societal relations that are intrinsically framed by feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Criminologies of the ‘alien other’, representing criminals as ‘dangerous members of distinct racial and social groups who bear little resemblance to “us”’ (Garland, 1996: 461) transforms into a fear of crime (Pain, 2008). Such constructions of fear and danger play important roles in invoking support for particular criminal justice strategies (Douglas, 1992). Therefore, these various responses to anxious fears about ‘crime waves’ in South Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006), often believed to originate from the economically fragile outskirts of the cosy city cores (Seekings, 1996), ought to stir questions of societal trust, spatial divisions and the ways in which suspicion is encountered on an individual and social level. The ways in which suspicion becomes processed and embodied are aspects of urban spatial exclusivity that are as academically intriguing as they are socially challenging.

The trust in state institutions to protect that John Locke (1967) once described as essential for the sharing of a social space is clearly corrupted in South Africa. Instead, suspicion and fear form a dangerous social symbiosis in that they create a deep-seated notion of instability and vulnerability. Formations of Neighbourhood Watch groups, often adding to private security personnel in protecting the wealthier urban spheres, constitute one way in which perceived vulnerability manifests. Agency and confidence are fostered through strategies of security such as

patrolling the streets and reporting back to neighbours about what is identified as ‘suspicious behaviour’. Against the backdrop of #hashtag-fuelled discourses on whose lives matter more than others, Neighbourhood Watch groups provide an ample ethnographic context in which to interrogate how notions of being unsafe and vulnerable become internalised as the responsibility to protect from those who commit crimes has ultimately been attributed to civilians.

With a rhetoric of machismo being globally on the rise and states and communities attempting to fence themselves off in efforts to keep out people understood as not belonging (whether in the European context of the ‘refugee crisis’ or in the very symbolic form of the gigantic border wall which Donald Trump promised to build in his electoral campaign to deter people from entering the USA via Mexico), embodied suspicion becomes a highly relevant topic as fears of crime become strategically fuelled in the process. The harsher the distinctions between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (see Nyamnjoh, 2006), the more spatial confines based on essentialised difference will there be within already vehemently ‘protected’ national borders too, as one can, for instance, observe with the Burka⁵ bans in Europe and the decision to display crucifixes in official buildings in Bavaria (Germany) with the declared intention to demonstrate a distinguishable ‘cultural identity’⁶. These are just a few of many examples that could be put forward in this context, rendering it abundantly clear that embodied suspicion has considerable impact on communities and will shape everyday relationships within them - especially when dividing sentiments are readily and widely shared through modern communication technologies and social media platforms.

This ethnography engages in depth with questions of how people in a post-colonial and post-Apartheid context (systems

⁵ A garment worn by women of some Islamic traditions, which covers body and most of the face.

⁶ <https://www.welt.de/regionales/bayern/article175790842/In-Landesbehoerden-haengen-kuenftig-Kreuze-zur-Begrueessung.html>.

based on culturally-framed divisions) live through uncertainty and continue to be in a space they consider to be unsafe; how relationships of trust are forged; how ‘suspects’ are produced; and how suspicion becomes ultimately cultivated. It focuses on strategies employed to cope with notions of vulnerability to crime in the context of suburban Observatory in Cape Town (South Africa) – or ‘Obz’, as it is known in local parlance. Using the local Neighbourhood Watch as a case study and a phenomenological ethnographic approach following Csordas’s (1999) methodological emphasis on immediate lived experience, this ethnography seeks to show just how perceptions of vulnerability affect notions of being in a space, taking shape through everyday activities and routines. The recently revived Obz Neighbourhood Watch (henceforth ONW) can be understood to be an urban renewal project, returning governance to the state (Jensen, 2006). As a state ally, the ONW co-produces a particular kind of subculture and is very avid in exchanging views via social media communication technologies. In order to capture the experiential aspects of the space, I focused on the embodiment of suspicion, as suspicion is not only something learned and performed, but also significantly shape social relationships in different ways. The ONW and its policing strategies will be looked at when critically engaging with the particular ways in which a fear of crime, or what I will be referring to as an ‘air of violence’, translates onto embodied practice. In this effort, the ONW will be examined in its capacity to offer a space in which perceived *precarity* (see Butler, 2016), fuelled by a fear of crime, becomes negotiated and transformed through the idea of relationality and an increased notion of agency.

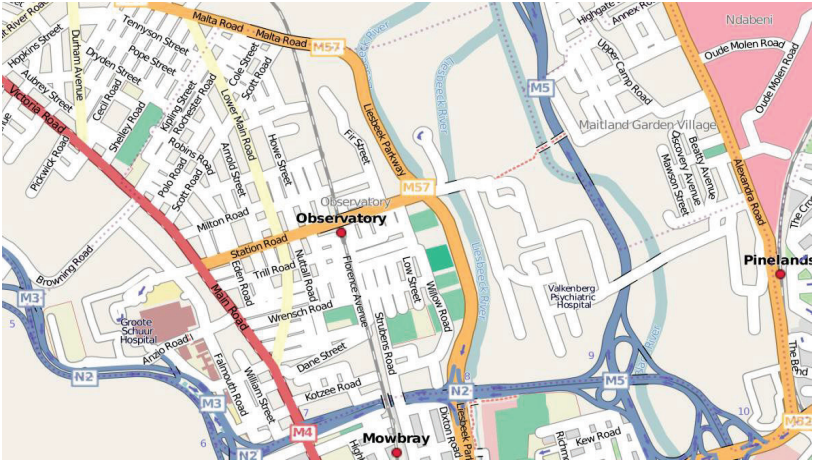


Figure 1: Areal map of Observatory⁷



Figure 2: Areal map of Observatory with patrolling sectors marked in different colours. Blue, red, orange, green and purple sector mark indicate the different patrol groups who focus on the areas they reside in⁸.

1.2. Motivations

My interest in the fear of crime was triggered by a particular

⁷ Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Observatory_OSM_map.svg.

⁸ Source: ONW archive.

personal experience, erupting from a Tuesday afternoon in the early summer months of 2014 in my home in Obz, Cape Town. Taking an afternoon nap on my couch, I woke to the sound of a backpack being zipped open and, upon opening my eyes, saw a strange man filling it with my belongings. With this severe disruption of my privacy went my feeling of security within my own home. Under verbal threats to kill me if I screamed and continuous eye contact with me the man quickly grabbed my camera, phone as well as my laptop, handbag and bicycle on the way out before rushing off into the streets, which were enlivened by rush hour movements. The objects the man stole were key in facilitating my mobility - physically in the form of my bicycle and passport (which happened to be in my handbag), financially through my credit card and cash as well as socially through the technical means to communicate over short and long distances (with my family in Germany for instance). The final version of my Honours dissertation, which got lost with my laptop, was meant to ensure my degree and thus open societal doors of possibilities. After this and other threatening encounters I started realising how my behaviour patterns became affected and I found myself adopting some of the 'friendly suggestions' that were made to me continuously since my arrival in Cape Town five years prior, planting a sporadically growing seed of suspicion.

Experiences like this and being constantly exposed to visually domineering security measures in Cape Town predicting similar scenarios are socially reflected in various forms, for instance through the relatively new WhatsApp⁹ chat groups in the neighbourhood that are meant to help track and anticipate

⁹ WhatsApp is a messaging application for smartphones, enabling the exchange of texts, recorded voice messages, pictures and calls in many countries. The application also offers a variety of 'emojis', which are symbols and smiley faces conveying a growing spectre of emotions that can be as complex as 'crying while laughing'. In the context of the ONW, the application is mainly used for texts (including emojis) and snapshots of 'suspects'.

patterns of crime. Being shared in different ways, individual stories, such as my own, can easily be turned into 'Mythostats – events that, in their singularity, come to signify collective being, collective trauma' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:31). Crime and the fear of crime attack the social, political and economic fabric of cities (Banister & Fyfe, 2001) and become fuelled through 'hyper-real' events, such as a live-documented police encounter mentioned in the introduction. While it is acknowledged that crime is a real threat to many in South Africa, the impacts of a constant and endless retelling of particular stories, becoming the 'measure of a traumatised citizenry transcending its differences' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:35) and is manifesting through social practices that are yet to be explored.

The Neighbourhood Watch and the suburb

When I arrived in Obz for the first time in 2010 straight from Cape Town international airport, what fascinated me the most were the one-storey houses that, to me, looked like part of a dream-like landscape, put together by somebody with Lego stones. Coming from Offenbach, a town right next to Frankfurt (Germany), where only the economically well-off manage to afford a house this close to the city core and most spaces are dominated by tall apartment buildings, Obz seemed to give off a scent of opportunity to me. I enjoyed walking the quiet streets and chatting to people crossing my path (something that people in German cities usually do not do). However, I also started experiencing the intrinsic social inequality that the maintenance of his Lego dreamland also seemed to be signifying. Consequently, the one-storey Victorian houses in Obz lost their charm for me, for a while - the cracks in their facades became more visible and the stretch of bars and cafes, dotting Lower Main Road which runs right across the 2000-household suburb, seemed less alluringly quirky than they used to. The emptiness of the street signified not peacefulness any longer but potential danger instead, even in broad daylight. However, even though

my corporeal being in this space could not remain ‘unspoiled’ by stories and experiences of social instability, Obz continues to fascinate me as it constitutes a unique socio-cultural space. The hosting of interns, students and backpackers while also being attractive to people from the surrounding areas due to its accessibility and vibrant night life as well as being known for drug trade render Obz a place of social diversity. At the same time, people who understand themselves to be local leaders or spokespeople make a conscious effort to ensure that Obz remains attractive to younger families, who, I am told by the ONW organiser, have started leaving the area around the end of the last century but could be seen to be slowly returning.

However, this is something I could not statistically validate. Allan, the operations director of the Observatory Improvement District (henceforth, Obsid) commented that this may, for now, just be a perception. There has been quite a notable socioeconomic shift from 1994, as district representative and hobby historian Tom Andrews told me. Before 1994, there were more ‘white working class’ families with children. ‘But Apartheid was not strictly enforced in Observatory’, Tom adds. ‘Coloured’ families bought local houses in closed corporations which did not have a race attributed to them and thus got around the Apartheid laws. The area was therefore racially mixed. Over time, child-rich families sieged in Obz. The suburbs’ own Boys High School and Girls High School were closed. The Junior School only continues its existence by bringing children in from outside the suburb, mostly from the townships. With drastically increasing property prices in the area in the last years, a process of gentrification has become visible, seemingly moving the trend towards young middle-class families again. Interestingly, while gentrification is often associated with decreasing crime levels, this is not the case in Obz, where crime continues being reported by the local news as peaking¹⁰.

¹⁰ For a broader historical outline see Nevin (2015).

Obz is known for its backpacker hostels and offers a selection of comparably cheap short-term accommodation in Cape Town. It serves as temporary shelter and entertainment-sphere for tourists and also has students and interns entering in fluctuating streams. At the same time, there was a perceived threat to the bohemian lifestyle that led to the establishing of the organisation Observatory Improvement District (*Obsid*) in 2010. The suburb is understood as liberal and progressively transformative. The revival of the ONW followed, a non-profit organisation, financed through increased property taxes and intending to ‘top up’ state services in the area, which were not considered sufficiently impactful in decreasing crime – nor was the private security company, hired by the Obsid. Community members claim that the former is not invested in making Observatory safer to its residents and security staff was often reported in the ONW chat-groups as sleeping on duty (with a number of members pointing out that this is due to low pay and lack of connectedness to the suburban space). As a community and by making use of local knowledge and relationships, the ONW thus meant to increase a notion of being safe in the suburb. The organisation generated this notion through a feeling of being interconnected and able to develop strategies against crime. These strategies, however idealised in theory, in reality often led to the reproduction of a social space in disharmony with prevailing ideals of equality and a harmonious living side-by-side in a space that incorporates the cultural heterogeneities of the Cape.

The main responsibility of the Obsid (although its official duty is general community upkeep) was considered to be crime prevention, the hiring of security companies and the instalment and management of cameras¹¹. When the Obsid came into being, the previously existing neighbourhood watch (then called ObsWatch) was abandoned. Contrary to the ONW, the

¹¹ See monthly publications of community paper Obslife, a selection of which is to be found in the appendix.

members of which were mostly local individuals, the ObsWatch was a group of professionals working at security firms who volunteered their time, John explained to me. In 2007, the group was revived after a spate of murders in the area but died down again due to a lack of people willing to patrol and the hiring of a private security company now covering suburb. The most recent revival of the Neighbourhood Watch (the ONW) at the beginning of 2015 happened due to dissatisfaction with the work of the private security company and overlapped with an increase of young families in the neighbourhood and a perceived spiralling of crime in the area. This ties in with a socio-demographic shift of the organisation that was previously dominated by older, 'white' men and constitutes now a slightly more diverse social mix. The group also used to be quite 'militant', as long-term organiser John puts it. In spite of this persisting (and still damaging, as many new members insist) image of having zero tolerance, for example towards vagrants, it was the lack of activity that let the organisation dry up. The new version of the group aims to connect to a neighbourhood that John describes as more 'academic'. For this purpose and to encourage people to patrol, the phrase 'neighbourhood watch' is either avoided or presented as a re-interpretation of a dusty and militant 'all-white-male' patrol group. The current ONW constitutes a fascinating context to investigate how community structures, institutions and individual notions of what it means to occupy a particular space at a given point in time tie in with each another. I critically engage with a notion of 'community', implying common interest, and highlight the divergent concerns about crime that forms part of this geographical area. Discussions within the different channels of communication used by the ONW members also make it clear that individuals may occupy different subject positions simultaneously with their relative importance shifting according to context.

Many members of the ONW use the different channels of the organisation to critically discuss and intellectualise issues of social inequality based on racial markers. Yet, the fear of crime

that I found to be enhanced by the ‘suspect’ or bodies characterised as ‘suspicious’ by ONW members reflect what Pain (2008) calls ‘white people fears’, often focussing on ‘other’ ethnic groups (also see Merry, 1981; Taub et al., 1984; Smith, 1986; Chiricos et al., 1997) and manifesting in the fear of social proximity to ‘other’ racial or ethnic groups. Pain (2008) refers to Smith (1984) and his finding that ‘labelling criminals with certain social identifiers increases personal feelings of power and security. In some localities where public racism is prominent, it provides another dimension of fear that consolidates spatial boundaries and control’ (Pain, 2008:377). Seekings (1996) shows that urban anxieties in the South African context are not a new development and have a certain history. Apartheid politics enforced the spatial segregation of the space into an urban core, the surrounding suburbs and the local slums or so-called ‘townships’, purposefully located distant to the urban core. With regards to male township youth, framed as a ‘lost generation’, Seekings (1996) shows that the image of being doomed to be a devalued part of society while carrying the potential for the destruction of the latter has been long established in South African contexts. While racism and social injustice are often critically discussed in the different forums of the ONW, concrete practices often conflict with expressed ideals of sociality.

The mission statement of the ONW on their Facebook page reads as follows:

The neighbourhood watch creates a sense of community by having members looking out for each other. Being observant, communicating and reporting any suspicious behaviour all aids in the prevention of crime and creates good neighbourliness¹².

‘Neighbourliness’, the ways in which people are connected, relates and communicates crime in Obz and impacts on the ways

¹² https://www.facebook.com/obswatch/info/?tab=page_info.

in which people remember, experience themselves and others in the present and plan for the future, taking shape in particular forms of agency (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The social webs woven through the organisation are often loosely - but sometimes closely - knit and can take physical or virtual forms, depending on individual needs. *Relationality* (Butler, 2011) and 'talking crime' as strategies in combating vulnerability to crime encourage a dominant public memory (see Appadurai, 2003) that may be in conflict with notions of Obz as a liberal social space and in continuation with a historical tendency of tying space to racial categories. The particular ways of relating in the suburb will be discussed in the chapters to follow and will tease out the body in its confrontation with *precariousness* and as 'playground' of both, oppression and resistance where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices, authority and subversion, power and defiance meet (Mbembe, 2001).

The ONW is a suburban volunteer group that aims to reclaim local streets during what is experienced as a peak of crime and framed as such in the local discourse. The streets of Obz are associated with criminal activity instead of playing children and mutually supportive community spirits. Thus, the neighbourhood is understood and largely lived in as a space shaped by insecurity and unpredictability. The feelings of uncertainty resulting from this understanding of the space, simultaneously characterised as liberal and bohemian, finds its expression in the forming of an idea of a 'suspect'. It is this 'suspect' that is searched for during street patrols and, in an abstracted form, becomes the topic of discussion in various chat groups that are meant to serve as information technologies, generating an awareness of crime incidents. It is here that ideals, hopes for the future and perceived present reality of the suburb seem to conflict the harshest. Nevertheless, understandings do intersect and materialise in the cultivation of the symbolic figure of a criminal and moral intruder, justifying various mechanisms that generate notions of increased safety and security. The conflict becomes clear in the different forms of local

networking, which lead to the overlapping and co- producing of particular life worlds in different ways. In this ethnography, I investigate the particular mechanisms employed in resisting vulnerability and the forms of embodiment tied to the life worlds produced in the process. I intend to tease out their daily intricacies and to explore networking and *relationality* (Butler, 2011) as strategies to counter vulnerability, leading to the overlapping and co-producing of particular life worlds. As an existential ground for the functionality of the ONW, the ways in which rather powerful social webs are established, managed and tended to are of great interest. An analysis of the practices of the ONW render it clear just how cultural practices change alongside alterations and shifts of spatial and bodily contours.

The ONW as a body – and bodies within the ONW

For some of the ONW members it is enough to be a nominal part of the group in order to feel safer; for others, the physical patrols are a calling and source of confidence. Others yet see their part in stimulating critical discussions of sociality and equality in virtual forums and committee meetings and some do their part as members ‘behind the scenes’ in the form of administrative work or lonesome patrols. Whichever one’s niche may be in the organisation, the ONW encourages the literal and symbolic coming together of bodies in the contestation of other bodies, necessarily conceptualised as different and threatening. Pain (2002) argues:

‘The fear of violent crime is best understood within a framework of social and spatial exclusion, through the nature of the power relations involved as sometimes obscured by the ‘othering’ of criminals, which takes various forms and is practised at various levels’ (Pain, 2008:366).

I understand the power of the social ties established and maintained through the organisation ONW (described later on

in ethnographic detail) to be a web of subtle exchanges of power (Foucault, 1978) as opposed to a unidirectional force. Rather than individuals 'ganging up' on 'outsiders' or perceived threats to their relatively comfortable and safe being in this locale, the ONW is a cultural space in which an idea of 'proper' social conduct is a frequent topic of discussion with different opinions clashing. Yet, 'the suspect', constitutes the conceptual glue that holds up justifications for people who understand themselves to be liberal and progressive to engage in an association quintessentially associated with the 'old days' when social and racial profiling and stereotyping was still state-implemented norm. The idea of 'the suspect' and its impact on corporeal strategies, deployed against vulnerability to crime by members of the ONW, are indicative of how social relationships can pan out and become shaped by the organisation and the suburb as a cultural space. This is highly relevant as: 'There is an urgent need to look at the relationship between bodies and places, not because of an academic requirement to sort out paradoxes, but because the ways in which we live out body/place relationships are political' (Nast & Pile, 2005:1).

In suburban Cape Town, a context in which stereotypes of 'the criminal' continue to be highly racialised (Jansen, 2008), a close look at the ambiguous and embodied engagements with these stereotypes is of great concern. According to Shields (1996), bodies are restricted and enclosed by the places that they inhabit, but they also themselves incarcerate and bind: 'these confinements shape a social architecture of the psyche: someone somewhere confines, while someone elsewhere is confined. These restraints on bodies and places are not simply material or discursive, but fantasized and lived' (Shields, 1996:6). It is the social texture (or architecture) resulting from this process of forming a connection between particular kinds of bodies while confining others that are of interest in this ethnography. Spatial relationships, coming together to make bodies and places through the body and through places, are exemplified through the body itself. In looking at the cultivation, embodiment and

performance of suspicion, I emphasise the plurality of meanings and various nuances of experience in managing the fear of crime.

Bodies in Obz map out a particular political terrain. Where the physical well-being of a person can only be insufficiently secured by the state and other societal structures, people live in precarity (see Butler, 2016 on precarity and precariousness). In Cape Town, dependency on others (precariousness) and precarity manifest in various ways for differently conceptualised bodies. The ONW is in itself an expression of precariousness in the suburb and requires for suburban, middle-class bodies to scan the neighbourhood for bodies understood as foreign and out-of-place. The cultivated idea of a ‘suspect’ and its impact on embodied behaviour and performance within the comforting space of mutual support and apparently shared interests within the organisation thus increases notions of agency for a particular kind of body, while increasing levels of social insecurities for the individuals matching the idea of the ‘phantom suspect’. Similar to Rich (1984), I understand the body to be a site of struggle, with its geopolitics being produced through unequal power relations. Via the different social positions that people occupy, the body is rendered both, mobile and channelled, fluid and fixed, into places (Nast & Pile, 2005:2). The scanning and categorising of peoples as well as the practices and strategies related to it have a conceptual and corporeal impact on the bodies considered to be ‘suspect’. This book pays particular attention to the ways in which bodies are made up, confined and mobilised in Obz through an ethnographic analysis of the practices and ‘talk’ of the ONW.

Foucault asserts that dividing practices are ‘constructed via the use of particular discourses to justify social and, at times, spatial divisions between various categories of humans’ (1977:477). He also warned that it is not a simple task to identify a specific discourse and understood these to be difficult to decipher as multiple discursive elements can come into play in various strategies. South Africa’s history invites for practices of exclusion to be channelled into a racial discourse, especially with

regards to communities that are gated and of a homogenous socio-demographic make-up. As the fear of crime ‘relates to the immediate details of environment and neighbourhood, it is historically and socially specific’ (Pain, 2008:379). A often traumatically experienced insecurity, prevalent economic and spatial divisions as well as an internalised history of racialising crime encourage the reproduction of particular notions of ‘the criminal suspect’ and hold promises for some whilst demonising others – but not without being ideologically challenged and experientially manoeuvred to some degree by the ONW members I encountered. The cultivation, embodiment and performance of suspicion and the forms of *relationality* (Butler, 2011) linked to it create a particular and ambiguous social space in Obz.

In her fascinating analysis of trust and rogueness in Observatory, Nevin found that ‘it is through trust that forms of reciprocity and belonging are negotiated, especially in particular urban spaces’ (Nevin, 2015:6). In doing my own fieldwork in suburban Obz and in looking at the ONW as well as other local institutions and individuals, I found particular forms of communicating and networking to be expressive of a fear of crime, nourished by particular kinds of discourses. I also found them to first and foremost signify a need for *relationality* (Butler, 2011) in exposure to crime as a particularly constructed reality. I therefore want to extend Nevin’s (2015) ethnographic findings by looking at the forms of distrust that go hand in hand with efforts to belong and in spite of continuously reported cases and recycled stories of crime. The trauma experienced by many members during criminal attacks and the processing of reported experiences of others through the different channels of the ONW group and other media were, at first, often outlined in sober language as events that have simply occurred. Yet, experiences of crime and the anticipation of further incidents surfaced as having a corporeal fullness to them. Expressions of this fullness become evident in practices of patrolling, communicating as well as other specific strategies of security.

1.3. Chapter outlines

This introductory chapter has provided the reader with an overall understanding of the intentions and motivations of the ethnographic research this book is based on and the kind of social environment in which it was conducted. This will be helpful in interpreting the consecutive chapters and making sense of my attempts to offer an impression of what it means to live in suburban Obz in confrontation with a perceived peak of crime. The following chapter contextualises and theoretically frames crime while chapter 3 seeks to outline the methodologies used to gather information on the topic as well as with the ethical challenges this process came with. Chapter 4 looks at people taking on the roles of patrollers in the neighbourhood and the strategies and accessories of security and stability used by them. It also engages with the different forms that fear of crime and notions of security can take. Subsequently, chapter 5 focuses on the ‘suspect’ as a motivator in patrolling the streets and illustrates how suspicion becomes a cultivated and embodied practice. Suspicion is thus seen as a relevant part of the bodily being in a place and the everyday realities of this context. Chapter 6 offers an engagement with patrolling as performance, an opportunity to construct a better future and to re-conceptualise oneself as an agent. As social media communication technologies play a great part in communicating about crime, understanding ‘suspects’ and cultivating particular forms of suspicion, the last ethnographic chapter (chapter 7) provides an in-depth analysis of these. Chapter 8 leaves the reader with conclusions that are not final – but rather aim to open up channels for new thoughts and discourses around the subject.

Contextualising crime

Abstract

This chapter outlines the theoretical and contextual backdrop of what it means to live through insecurities in suburban Cape Town on a daily basis. It outlines the theoretical concepts used in grappling with vulnerability in this context and emphasises the usefulness of seeing and reading protective mechanisms through the body. The chapter continues with a description of the quality fearing crime takes, in the suburb Obx specifically and, more broadly, in Cape Town and South Africa. Desires for safety, security and social comfort will become evident in this section. Finally, the chapter engages with literature on topics of crime in South Africa and beyond and shows that the ethnographic approach employed in this study is important in highlighting individual agencies within an environment in which fear plays a significant role in how the everyday is manoeuvred. Understanding the theory and literature used to engage with precariousness and fear as well as the wider social circumstances will enable the reader to see the relationships and grittiness of daily life in the suburb captured in the chapters to follow in their ambiguous colourfulness.

2.1. Theoretical framing

Butler (2016) and Allison (2012) understand *precarity* as being related to expectations and, particularly, to the consequences of their non-fulfilment (such as secure labour). This has social ramifications in terms of relationships and social practices. *Precariousness* as a concept is described as a condition shared for all human life, the exposure to others from the moment of birth and through the relying on others. The concept mainly refers to the political and economic conditions under which people attempt to secure their lives. Being exposed to precarity and precariousness, Butler (2016) argues, creates a sense of vulnerability, which, I argue, is a condition imposed upon Cape

Townians through an ‘air of violence’.

I focus on the embodiment of suspicion as suspicion is not only something learned, cultivated and performed, but also has a significant taken-for-granted influence on social relationships. It becomes relevant within different social platforms. Thus, embodied suspicion has a considerable impact on communities, especially when readily and widely shared through technologies like WhatsApp and becomes visualized through the use of pictures, dominating local forums and news. The concepts of performance and embodiment are also useful in looking at relationships and understandings of ‘community’ critically as they harbour the threat of conceptually and harmoniously unifying what is, indeed, opaque.

The body itself is central in my analysis and interpretation of embodied behavioural patterns and corporeal experiences (Csordas, 1999). In the study context, some bodies can be considered more vulnerable than others, depending on whether they are recognised as adequate or inadequate to the space they inhabit and thus worthy or unworthy of substantial forms of recognition (see Butler, 2016 on terms of recognition). I found vulnerability to be expressed through particular bodily strategies of patrolling and surveillance in projecting a brighter and safer future. I do not only consider the body to be mindful (in that body and mind are intertwined) but also think of it as socially embedded in different ways (both aspects borrowed from Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987).

Mauss (1936) describes bodily actions as the embodiment of a particular cultural context with varying practices being impacted on by intersecting factors such as gender and class. He considers the manner in which people walk or eat to be bodily techniques, crafts to be learnt, which become adapted depending on different situations. Bourdieu (1990) developed this idea further into the idea of the *habitus*, which are socialised tendencies or norms that guide how people behave and think. These can bind people into groups. In the South African context, vulnerability to crime and the state of precarity

manifests and translates onto habits and bodily skills. According to Warnier (2007), these skills and habits are also tied to power relationships - the technologies of which diffuse into bodies and the ways in which people understand their place in the world (their notion of subjectivity). While embodied vulnerabilities may be fragmented and hard to pinpoint, they are revealing when it comes to the making of self, identity and belonging (Van Wolputte, 2004).

In spite of the considerable effects of trauma criminal acts induce into bodies and notions of self, research on crime often limits itself to analysing a particular space and its relationship with violent practices. As a result, race and class are often turned into space (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). However, space is, in its first instance, 'a product of human practice, both material and meaningful; it cannot, in itself, reveal hidden causes – however it may be mapped' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:26). In engaging with the body itself as a vehicle for communication and inscription, this ethnography hopes to contribute to a body of research geared towards a multi-faceted engagement with crime and violence in South Africa and intends to avoid demonizing or victimizing particular groups of people. It furthermore seeks to understand how the body is re-positioned or represented in everyday life (see Goffmann, 1949, on the presentation of self in everyday life), how the body moves through the city (see de Certeau, 1984 and Lefebvre, 1991; 1996), and the ways in which social actors 'discipline' their bodies (see Foucault, 1977).

2.2. Background and contextualisation

This section seeks to contextualise what I have described as deep-seated notions of instability in Observatory. Situating the suburb with its particularities in a broader context is necessary in order to emphasise how the etic and the emic tie in with one another and become observable through routines and ordinariness. I argue that the historical moment the country

finds itself in is essential to keep in mind while interpreting behaviour in any specific context. It shall thus serve as a frame for the reader in interpreting the ethnographic data that will be provided in the main chapters.

In March 2015, a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) journalist Vuyo Mvoko and his media crew were robbed live on national television outside a hospital in the quiet area of Milpark, Johannesburg as they covered a story on the health of the visiting Zambian president. In front of a running camera, they were robbed of their phones and wallets. Following this incident, a series of news reports by the international media reinforced South Africa's already notorious image as 'the crime capital of the world'. As a comment from the SA National Editors' Forum (*Sanele*) put it, it 'brings home the level of criminality in our society'¹³. The robbers did not seem to be bothered by the presence of the camera and did not try to stay out of the picture. Not only can the numerous news pieces reporting on crime on a daily basis be interpreted as grotesque evidence for a normalised climate of crime in South Africa, but also as imbuing their consumers with a sense of unpredictability and vulnerability. John and Jean Comaroff consider these stories 'crime tales' or 'mundane melodramas whose endless retailing appears to wrest order from chaos' (2006:29). Even though crime statistics are considered to be deliberately kept low (Lemanski, 2004), they still seem to roughly match the realities created by media reports. The role played by statistics is pertinent as a medium of communication and daily staple for the media whose fluctuations, according to the Comaroffs (2006), mark the pulse of national life and can be considered 'fact-making fiction' in that they become 'deeply inscribed in narratives of personal being' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:16;10). Circulations of particular disproportional and dramatic incidents in the South African context can have a considerable impact on peoples' sense of being and self.

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31831824>

Police crime statistics from 2017¹⁴ show that, nationwide, crime overall and contact crimes have increased in comparison to 2016. Total crime was highest in Central Cape Town with 35208 reported cases - most of them theft and ‘common robberies’ (without aggravating circumstances). The Western Cape Province positioned itself as number two in a national ranking (also taking into consideration total numbers of crimes) just after number one Gauteng. According to an ongoing online survey 35% of respondents have been victims to crime in the last six months¹⁵.

In her research on crime in Cape Town Lemanski (2004) finds that, statistically, despite reductions of some crimes on a national level at the time, one-third of the crimes committed in South Africa were violent, which is more than double the corresponding value in the USA. This indicates the extremity of violence in South Africa, which is considered to have one of the highest crime rates worldwide (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). As they become ‘fetishized’ in the South African context (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006), these numbers represent an atmosphere of vulnerability, affecting the people inhabiting the space on various levels. Even when there is a decrease of crime rates, a publication of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC, 2008) showed, ‘deep-seated fears about personal and community safety continue to be shared by a sizable contingent of South Africans across the socio-economic and demographic spectrum’¹⁶. It is this atmosphere that I refer to as an ‘air of violence’ since it constitutes an ever present reality for people in South Africa, reinforced through the ‘fact-making fiction’ of the media and other institutions, which the Comaroffs (2006) deem to be very impactful when it comes to perceptions and being in a space.

¹⁴ See <http://www.crimestatssa.com/> and <https://africacheck.org/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.crimestatssa.com/surveyresults.php>.

¹⁶ See <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/review/june-2008/age-of-hope>.

Steinberg (2001:2) finds that crime and the fear of crime are ‘as old as South Africa itself’. What is more, Lemanski (2004:11) considers it ‘likely that the media and everyday “talk of crime” are as powerful in perpetuating fear of crime as crime itself’. Even if inhabitants of suburban Cape Town may not always be consciously alert to the risks they are exposed to and may choose to avoid reminders thereof, risks are framed as a particular kind of reality via different media and everyday conversations and can thus be presumed to affect the general public. The impact of a generally perceived vulnerability to crime onto peoples’ *corporeality* (Csordas, 1999), their notion of being in a body and oriented in space, and how bodies are prepared to deal with crime vulnerability is of interest in this study.

With reference to economic impacts, Polanyi (2001) describes vulnerability as an increased threat to human well-being and as reduced mechanisms to cope with these threats. In looking at bodily practices and ‘techniques’ of the body (Mauss, 1934; Warnier, 2007), I understand vulnerability to be the perceived exposure to risk, hazards and unpredictability and a form of embodied trauma. My conceptualisation also encompasses the capability of coping with exposure to violence through the development of strategies as a form of resilience (see for example Obrist, 2006, on living successfully with urban risks).

Looking solely at numbers, which have come to dominate analysis of crime, violence is usually represented as an issue of the lower socio-economic classes in South Africa (Seekings, 1996), especially in the light of nationwide spikes of xenophobic attacks on foreigners. In response to the 2015 attacks, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Zulu king’s traditional minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi located the source of such violent outbursts in a ‘culture of xenophobia’ within which ‘it takes little to spark violence’¹⁷. As Sharp (2008) has observed against the backdrop of similar hunts and killings of foreigners

¹⁷ Cape Times, 21.04.15

in the Western Cape in 2008, this focus on the lower classes serves as a convenient distraction from structural problems and the role of the wealthy and powerful in solving them. Xenophobia, the fear of 'the other', is not only evident in encounters of foreign nationals and nationals. The presence of 'others' in any form or shape in spaces reserved for the privileged, such as the southern suburbs of Cape Town, spark fear and with it different forms of violence (Lemanski, 2004). Violence is likely to trigger counter-violence in turn (McKendrick & Hoffmann, 1990), sustaining- and re-composing a climate of suspicion und insecurity. A sense of vulnerability manifests on social and structural levels, absorbing suspicion as well as practices fuelled by it as seemingly necessary mechanisms for survival or well-being.

Even though poor areas such as Nyanga or Manenberg on the outskirts of Cape Town are at the top of the list when it comes to murder in particular, the 'air of violence' has a broad reach and South Africa's population can generally be considered anxious in this regard (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). Crime may be unevenly distributed in the country. Still being segregated along various lines, it can be argued that 'whites and Indians suffer attacks on their property, blacks and coloureds on their person' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). However, the media frequently report on violent crime where the privileged of the society are concerned. The violent death of the national goal keeper, Senzo Meyiwa, at his secured home in Johannesburg¹⁸ demonstrates that crime and violence are not exclusive to poor areas; as does the stabbing of the Slovakian ambassador's wife when taking a walk at the beach front in Hout Bay on a warm February afternoon¹⁹. A Victim Crime survey in 2014 showed that 75% of all those interviewed believed that crime is mostly

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/26/south-africa-goalkeeper-senzo-meyiwa-dead>.

¹⁹ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Ambassadors-wife-recovering-after-stabbing-in-Hout-Bay-20150224>.

motivated by drug related needs and not by ‘real’ needs. Greed was believed to be the main motivator for crime by 42%. Both, notions of greed and drug abuse are factors that render contact-crime a threat transcending social class and rendering the outcome of it difficult to judge. These associations thus contribute to a sense of general vulnerability to violence whether in poor or privileged neighbourhoods. I am interested in how vulnerability to crime is experienced in the suburban middle-class context.

Vulnerability to crime extends from the individual, phenomenologically experienced body to the ‘social body’ in interaction with others and becomes a regulated object when understood as the ‘body politic’ (Scheper Hughes & Lock, 1987). Within this fieldwork context, the three roles of the body – the individual and social body as well as the body politic – influence one another. Certain bodies become symbolic for crime and, made into such symbols, trigger violent responses. In an attack on a domestic worker in Kenilworth for instance, the perpetrator excused his own crime arguing that he took the woman for a sex worker. The light-skinned 41-year old committed member of the “security committee” of the suburb explained later that this was because the woman was walking in a district where sex is known to be offered in exchange for money²⁰. After throwing her repeatedly to the ground, the man from the southern suburbs moved away, just to turn around and shout at someone who came to the woman’s aid that she was a ‘criminal’²¹. The middle-aged, dark-skinned woman and grandmother of three who was on her way from her home in the informal settlement Khayelitsha to a cleaning job in the suburb. The individual, phenomenological and violent experience of the attack became symbolic in discussions around regulations of sex work and the violations associated with it. The story also reveals

²⁰ <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/he-came-up-to-me-and-just-klapped-me-1767030>.

²¹ <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/I-thought-she-was-a-prostitute-20141018>.

how particular bodies become profiled and symbolic of crime with this social fingerprinting and ideological segregation of bodies remaining largely based on racial markers and particular understandings of localities that keep being cultivated in certain ways.

Violence is judged context-specifically. The judge in the Oscar Pistorius trial decided in his favour and kept his punishment low as he was defending the shooting of his girlfriend by claiming he mistook her for a burglar²². The internationally debated sentence was doubled later on. Pistorius testified that he suddenly felt ‘a sense of terror rushing over’ him – triggered by a noise from the bathroom²³. While this may be a reasonable line of juristic defence in the South African context and releasing fatal shots at a person as an understandable response to fear; I imagine the same justification to be met with a lack of understanding, for instance in a European context in which crime is on the increase²⁴ but much less part of ‘the public mind’ (see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:16). In the case of Pistorius, the fear of any form of ‘other’ penetrating what has been constructed as ‘proper’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘safe’ served as an explanation for the crime committed. What is more, a low penalty would have impacted on societal regulations in re-defining what constitutes a crime when compared to another as it can be used by lawyers in the future as reference.

In the cases mentioned, the rush and even fatal responses to moments of being suspicious and feeling threatened in some way are of a specific quality in Cape Town with there being a quick resolve to violence as a means to combat insecurity. There appears to be an undercurrent moving under the regular state of affairs, triggered by a fear of crime, substantially linked to

²² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/21/oscar-pistorius-trial-full-story-reeva-steenkamp>.

²³ <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2013/feb/19/oscar-pistorius-trial-reeva-steenkamp>.

²⁴ violent criminality increased by 22% between 1997-2001 in Europe (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006).

perceptions of certain bodies being under siege by particularly conceptualised 'others' and having to defend themselves. The victim in the Pistorius case, persistently referred to as a 'model' in media reports about the fatal shooting was internationally considered tragic and memorable and Pistorius's cultivation of a masculinity, involving the use of guns and performed violence, opened up questions about a problematic embodiment of crime, fears and social comfort in the South African context.

Vulnerability to crime and insecurity can manifest in different ways – symbolically through fences and private security, more subtly through everyday encounters and relationship, finding their expression in various practices. According to Bannister and Fyfe (2001), the fear of crime is a more widespread phenomenon than crime itself but at least as damaging to the social and political fabric of cities. What constitutes violence, McKendrick and Hoffmann (1990) emphasize, is always a social construction and the line between what are socially acceptable scenarios of violence and illegitimate violence is thin. If violence is defined as being structurally implemented (see Farmer, 2009 on structural violence) and as comprising not only physical but also mental and emotional damage (Walter, 1996), it becomes debatable which violence is greater- the building of fences and policing strategies to keep a particular group of people out of a space or the breaking through the fences, erected as social barriers. Whether it is an armed robbery or any form of 'armed response' (the name of a locally popular private security company), the body and pain are significantly central to categorical punishment and allocation of social and physical space (see Caldeira, 2000).

High levels of fear and notions of insecurity cannot always be adequately explained by measures of exposure to risk. In the formerly, by law, 'white' suburbs (which remain largely this way) people are less likely to become victims to crime than in other areas and most felonies have been on a downward spiral since 1990 (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). However, there appears to be an inverse relationship between fear and crime. According to

Killias (1990), vulnerability can thus be considered a key variable behind the observed distribution of fear of crime with physical, social, and situational factors of vulnerability being of great relevance. Levels of crime in different spaces in South Africa and their visibility render an interrogation of the ways in which vulnerabilities translate onto actual practices an interesting, but neglected, focal point for social scientists. As McKendrick and Hoffmann (1990) have established in the South African context, violence can injure and destroy, restrict lifestyles, evoke fear, damage relationships, dehumanize, alienate, cause psychological disruption and lead to moral atrophy. This ethnography focuses on the impact of the vulnerability to crime in suburban Cape Town onto social practices and relationships, as seen through the body. Where the physical well-being of a person can only be insufficiently secured by societal structures, people live in *precarity* (Butler, 2016). In the particular context of Cape Town, the dependency on others (*precariousness* as understood by Butler, 2016) and precarity manifest in various ways. Creating stability by establishing relationships while simultaneously maintaining social boundaries can be important mechanisms in dealing with distortion and the fear of crime. The spatial organisation and segregation that comes with it are also linked to recent indications that ‘Africa is coming to the Cape’ (Lemanski, 2004, Nyamnjoh, 2006, Sharp, 2008), adding to a mass of bodies that continue to be strategically kept out of the city (Lemanski, 2004). While vulnerability to crime in the South African context is thematised on a regular basis (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006), its experiential aftermath is not. This research aims to fill this epistemological gap.

As previously pointed out, South Africa tends to be thought of as being characterised by a high degree of fatal violence. Before and during the locally hosted world cup of 2010, South Africa was globally framed as the crime capital of the world. In the UK, ‘stab vests’ were designed in order to allow tourists to follow the soccer spectacle on the ground without a potential

attack on them having to be lethal²⁵. Crime is thought of not as organised but rather as the spontaneous recognition of an opportunity or an outburst of violent tendencies with the perpetrator being unstable, irrational and lacking human characteristics. Brutal rape cases and killings reported in the news enhance the notion that crime in South Africa is linked to a disrespect for human life and townships are often viewed as breeding grounds for violence and lawlessness (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006; Seekings, 1996). Reports feeding into this can be considered archived memories, causing for particular kinds of cultural identities to become reproduced (Appadurai, 2003). The suburban space is conceptualized as inherently different from a surrounding sea of unpredictability in that it is supposedly contained, meant to be safe and isolated. Hence, there is an anxiety to maintain suburbs as idyllic islands of harmony. The rougher the sea is observed and reported to be, the greater the anxieties to protect the space inhabited.

In suburban Cape Town where the vast majority of homes are secured by bars, barbed wires, alarm systems or are guarded by dogs and private security personnel, the fear of not being able to hold onto things and the effort to protect one's well-being leap to the eye - especially the eye of someone unfamiliar with these highly visible measures for security and safety. The practice of fencing and arming somewhat contradicts ideas of suburbia as a place characterised by peace, predictability and, perhaps, even dullness. What is at risk are not merely material objects. As the Oscar Pistorius trial implicated, a sense of 'security' in South Africa is also tied to ideas of personhood. Being able to protect oneself is particularly tied to notions of vulnerable masculinities and gendered ideas of power and weakness constitute an everyday concern for many South Africans (see for examples Gutmann, 1997; Morell, 2001; Seale, 2009). Women are often seen as potential victims of crime and thus find themselves forced to develop mechanisms in order to counter-act their

²⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8465195.stm>.

victimisation and thus inherent vulnerability (see for examples Holst, 1995; Salo, 2013). Fears of crime are complex and take partial root in the prevailing economic and spatial segregations of the Cape Townian population, which continue to coincide with racial classifications²⁶. (One of the first questions the police officers asked me after the break-in at my home was if the intruder had been ‘coloured’²⁷. An estimated 90% of the mug shots presented to me were of people who would, in the South African context, generally be categorised as such).

Living in suburban, middle class Cape Town it is difficult to escape the deeply seated fears of becoming a victim to violence and material loss. As a social crisis, crime tends to be linked to a lack of economic and social prospects. The identified lack is, in turn, linked to South Africa’s history of segregation of groups of people on various levels²⁸, and wrapped in racial rhetoric (see for example Glaser, 2000, on youth gangs in Soweto). Fears of ‘the other’ resulting from practices of segregation offer fertile soil for insecurities and a sense of vulnerability to thrive upon. Increasing visibilities of crime in previously protected areas and the increased media coverage has fuelled public anxieties with regards to crime and often lead to the fortification of Cape Town’s suburbs (Lemanski, 2004). Those anxieties tend to be presented as inevitable consequences of the politics of segregation and fear of the past but are seldom looked at as a contemporary and extraordinary phenomena. Anxieties also become fuelled as part of a political repertoire. For instance, reports on developing movements supported by the political party Economic Freedom Front (EFF) that aim, as the party explains, to occupy not only unclaimed but also inhabited space

²⁶ With the colonialization of South Africa and the implementation of strictly racially segregating Apartheid laws the following categories were established, ripened and propagated: ‘Black’ (dark-skinned); ‘Coloured’ (racially mixed) and ‘White’ (light-skinned or Caucasian).

²⁷ One of the racial categories of Apartheid that are still in use today.

²⁸ Reference to the Group Areas Act (Act No. 41 of 1950) controlling the occupation and acquisition of land and property and premises

in wealthy areas by masses of ‘outsiders’ are meant to highlight a particular kind of vulnerability, intertwined with the fear of violence. They are especially fuelled by mythologies of a “white genocide”, a widely recognised discourse which President of the United States of America Donald Trump fuelled via a deliberately provocative tweet. What Agbola (1997) has termed the ‘architecture of fear’ and segregation of public space is based on physical markers of difference, often essentially based on skin tone and features tied to racial categories and stereotypes. The ‘architecture of fear’ encompasses the ways in which contemporary landscapes in cities are shaped by society’s preoccupation with fear and how this becomes apparent in home design, security systems and gated communities. The ‘air of violence’ as an analytical tool incorporates the notion that fears can present themselves in material form, but extends this concept in understanding fear as a less tangible quality. This quality or ‘air’ becomes materiality in different ways but it is the impact of embodied practice that is of particular interest of this research. Its effects manifest themselves deeply on an individual, social and institutional level and contradict any post-apartheid-rainbow-nation ideal. The economy of security and its infrastructure play an integral part in the distribution of fear in Cape Town. As the state’s monopoly of policing gets broken, patterns of segregation and class differences deepen as there is a need to maintain the market and differentiate between different types of bodies – those who have to be protected on the one hand and those who constitute a threat to the well-being of the former on the other.

The root of the ‘evil’ is often ideologically located within the layer of the metropolis that has been disconnected from the general fabric of the city (Rodgers, 2004), the outer layer that consist of the so called ‘townships’. The evil in its imagined physical form is also gendered (male), often young and racialised (usually as ‘black’ or ‘coloured’). Crime in the South African context is thus stereotyped. As Caldeira (2000:91) states, in the context of Sao Paulo, young men in the city are considered ‘easy

targets for the forces of evil'. The imagined body penetrated by the evil is also poor, as poor bodies are seen to be closer to necessity and nature rather than rational behaviour and reason (Caldeira, 2000). They are also physically closer to spaces associated with crime. It is usually institutions that are rendered responsible in controlling these bodies. If those institutions seemingly fail in so doing, barriers are built and all types of private control established (Caldeira, 2000). Fortified houses constitute the aesthetical norm in the suburbs while private security companies are meant to keep an eye on those who look 'suspicious'. Some bodies are recognised as inadequate to the suburban space. When I was robbed at my home, the police brought a random man in his 30s back to my house in the back of the police van. The man looked beaten by life and simply happened to be around. His poorly maintained body was not merely identified as not belonging in the suburban space, but also instantly categorised as potentially dangerous and violent as he had been handcuffed. Notions of public space accessible to everyone was thus discarded and his 'right' to a certain 'part of the city' (Darcy & Rogers, 2014) was suddenly denied based on a wild suspicion that made it possible to render this man less of a citizen (see Allison, 2012; Butler, 2016; Biehl, 2007; Standing, 2011; Stewart, 2012) or 'ex-human' (Biehl, 2007). This presents a good example of how guardians of the law distribute further precarity (Butler, 2016) instead of creating order or offering security. In their own state of precarity (Butler, 2016), certain bodies in the suburban space become criminalised as they are recognised as unworthy of owning the full status of a human being. They can thus be seen to suffer a form of 'public death' (Biehl, 2007).

Observatory offers a particularly interesting space for doing research on the fear of crime and loss, and the bodily practices developed to deal with it. Having worked for the local newspaper, I came to understand that the discourse of crime is a constant and dominant one when it comes to thinking about the quality of living in Obz – also often described as bohemian

and diverse. Supposedly a space for everyone, it does to some degree guard itself as what Caldeira (2000) has called a fortified enclave, a walled and private space inhabited by the middle- and upper class. This ideological in-betweenness is also reflected in its geographic location. Situated between Salt River, a poorer suburb with a thriving drug trade, and suburbs like Mowbray, Rosebank and Rondebosch, which are predominantly occupied by students and well-off families, Obz struggles to police its borders and maintain its image of a suburb that transcends apartness within the urban sphere. One of the editions of the monthly paper *Obslife* that was published while I was doing fieldwork in Obz (in February 2015) contained several articles and letters of readers who expressed anxiety about the levels of security after several break-ins and related stabbings had occurred within a short period of time had occurred. These concerns are often linked back to the investment in private security companies, which are employed in the area as an addition to the regular police controls by the Woodstock police station²⁹ (frequently criticised for being dysfunctional; see Gillespie (2007; 2008)). While such discourses are channelled by few, they will affect many in one way or another. As private security patrols are not considered to be successful in reducing crime in the suburb, the Observatory Neighbourhood Watch became revived after three years of inactivity. At the start of my fieldwork, the local initiative and response to crime had been active for a few weeks only and encompassed roughly 10% of the population of the suburb. The members were well interconnected through social media such as Google groups and WhatsApp chat groups through which crime is recorded and reported on a sub-community level. At these beginning stages of the group, discussions around the possibility of carrying licensed firearms when patrolling the suburb were surfacing. In an empirical study,

²⁹ The Woodstock Police Station is located between Salt River (a low income suburb attached to Obz) and the city centre – the final urban destination with a string of Southern Suburbs leading up to it.

Brunton-Smith and Sturgis (2011) have found that neighbourhood structural characteristics, visual signs of disorder, and recorded crime have direct and independent effects on individual-level fear of crime. The increase of security measures in Observatory can thus be presumed to impact on an individual's sense of vulnerability, and thus on how bodies are deployed against it. WhatsApp and Google chat groups also create an alchemy of numbers that translate onto everyday discourse. In this context, narratives of 'lawlessness might console, enthrall, indict; especially among those who take personal safety as a right and have property to protect' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). This study's focus is not just on these numbers, but on the ways in which fear of these numbers and statistics, and in particular the insecurity that has come to define daily life in Observatory, is confronted through "bodily techniques" (Mauss, 1936; Warnier, 2007, Foucault, 1988).

2.3. Reading crime and vulnerability in South Africa

On the subject of violence, Lee and Stanko (2014) pose the challenging question of how something so pervasive can remain so elusive to research. Social studies and anthropology in particular have been mainly concerned with finding explanations for crime and violence and its distribution (Gillespie, 2014), with policing (Hornberger, 2014; Jensen, 2014) and the penalization of crime (Lynch, 2015; Gillespie, 2008) or with the people who commit crime themselves (see for example Radebe, 2014; Glaser, 2000). While coping with crime has been of interest in fields like psychology, it has not been exhaustively tended to within the discipline of anthropology. I consider the 'air of violence' described thus far to be a form of brutality. Revived on a daily basis, this brutality becomes collective trauma in South Africa and distributes a general sense of vulnerability. Vulnerability as embodied trauma and a form of structural violence should not remain as unexplored, as Lee and Stanko

(2014) argue violence in general to be.

Boers (1991) developed a model to systematically and interactively analyse the fear of crime and considers two different cognitive processes of judging a situation: the personal evaluation of the risk and of one's personal abilities to cope with the evaluated situation. Those evaluations, he states, may be linked to emotions of fear and anxiety that impact on body and mind. Similarly to the constant sickness that the women of the Xe'caj group describe as an experience due to a constant exposure to violence (Green, 1994), vulnerabilities in Cape Town can also be seen as rupturing the connections between body, mind and spirit as they manifest in physical as well as psychological ways. In the same manner that the women's illnesses find expression in social relations between the individual, social, and body politic – the fear of crime becomes a 'way of life' in the same respect as it manifests on various levels, rendering everyday security strategies ordinary. When they become routine and thus habitualised (Bourdieu, 1990), such practices do not only become expressions of a way of thinking but also serve to maintain particular social structures.

According to Lemanski (2004) the fear of crime is linked to the fear of an 'Other' as much as it is expression of powerlessness due to a loss of control over territory and urban order. Socio-spatial segregations in Cape Town and an unequal ability to protect, she argues, appears remarkably similar to urban apartheid and its social consequences are the same: 'As those with wealth have blockaded themselves, their fear of the increasingly unknown outside has exploded, leading to further fortification and, hence, deeper fear' (Lemanski, 2004:6). While it might not be the *swaart gevaar* (Afrikaans for 'black danger') that is propagated in order to encourage the practice of fencing, moral panics of apocalyptic proportions justify the building of enclaves. Such enclaves are characterized by physical separation (walls, gates), symbolic exclusion (perceptions of undesirables), private security (armed guards, electronic surveillance), inward-facing self-containment and (artificial) social homogeneity'.

However, as Lemanski (2004) shows, research in America and South Africa disputes suggestions that gated or monitored communities lead to a decrease in crime rates and increased community ties but indicates that the erecting of walls and other boundaries rather facilitate social exclusion. Not only does the practice of fencing constitute an ‘architecture of fear’ Agbola (1997), but it can also be presumed to impact social practice and notions of being in a space.

Gillespie (2014) suggests that murder rates should be the ‘starting point of accounting for the distribution of violence across the whole city [...]’. This research will take a general awareness of crime (‘real’ and manufactured through ‘mythostats’ (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006)) as a starting point for its interrogations as it considers this awareness to be a form of violence, penetrating everyday routines. Studies of crime have thus far focused on statistics and the exploring of reasons and explanations for crime prevalence. This research aims to shift the focus from the potential sources of crime to the everyday engagement with its perceived presence, manifesting in bodily practice. Linking practices to individual life histories will help understand the detrimental effects that fear of criminal violence has on the quality of life at individual, community and societal levels.

Inserting the self in the field: How to ‘do’ research on vulnerability and ethnographic methods as ethics

Abstract

Researching vulnerability and the fear of violent intrusions is a difficult task and forming its findings into an ethnographic story is a dangerous one. In the following chapter, I grapple with questions of what it means to insert oneself into a space as a researcher and look at the politics of self that are involved in the process of becoming a part of it. In so doing, I investigate methodologies as ethics and dissect what ‘doing research’ and ‘doing ethics’ might mean. I also discuss the implications of employing my body in the field whilst researching bodies looking for other bodies and the various ethical challenges that come with the process of becoming a corporeal part of my own research.

3.1. Introduction

I conducted my fieldwork in Obz over a period of 10 months. After establishing networks and relationships in the field, I had a number of people contributing to my research with valuable information about the topic of coping with crime. The strong core of main informants consisted of ONW members whom I mainly connected with when patrolling together, but also at the monthly meetings of the group. Richard, Christina and John were most frequently available to guide me through the topic from their points of view and update me on happenings in the suburb and in their lives. However, I approached and semi-formally interviewed many other people in Obz and adhered to the ethical guidelines of the Anthropology Southern Africa (ASA) in the process. I protected my informants by using pseudonyms and by keeping sensitive information about them to myself. In instances when I picked up that people were not

keen to share personal information, I let the conversation be stirred into directions more comfortable for my informants for the time being. I also refrained from pressing for information when people were clearly not interested in engaging with me at all. Nor did I make use of the database I had access to as a member of the ONW (numbers and email addresses) as I would have found it inappropriate to contact self-chosen non-patrollers whom I was not able to meet otherwise. What is more, I reciprocated in different ways whenever I saw a chance to do so, whether it was through lending my ear to stories urging to be told or bringing chocolate or cake for meetings over coffee with Christina or Richard. I found participant observation and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) to be useful in helping me to avoid reducing my informants to what they are anxious about, as the anticipation of crime is far from the only aspect impacting on their lives. These are methods that may be considered standard in anthropology and essential to mention in any research proposal. ‘Participant observation’ as an ethnographic research method as introduced by Malinowski (1922) involves living amongst the ‘natives’ and obtaining their point of view as opposed to practicing ‘armchair anthropology’. However, this is only possible to degrees and relies on the idea of there being a radical separation between ‘home’ and ‘the field’ when these distinctions are in reality often blurry. ‘Thick descriptions’ are a way of note-taking during the research and presenting research findings in a form of writing that is accessible to the reader. Its aim is to avoid projecting one’s views as a researcher onto the reader. This, as well, may only be possible to degrees as the researcher and writer does introduce certain lines of thinking the reader will struggle to be completely freed from. I consider participant observation and thick description to be more than a formality and an approach in collecting data. Taking part in my informants’ lives, collecting observations made and putting them into words, had an impact on my sense of self in the field and the ways in which I was seeing things around me. In order to gain a deeper insight into peoples’ everyday lives, relationships

were spun – with some becoming more and some less intimate, helping me to become a cultural ‘insider’ in an organisation unfamiliar to me until the start of the research and to gain an emic perspective into it. Most certainly, long term contact, proximity and gaining acceptance as a researcher (Bernard, 2014) were essential in the creation and maintenance of these relationships. This included physical proximity (of living in the field) as well as proximity through communication technologies, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, with the former having played a particularly important role in the setting up of meetings and interviews. As Geertz (1973) suggested, I aimed to represent the cultural context of my research as text and as symbol upon which my own - and the reader’s analysis of the topic at hand would rely. My own and my participants’ bodies offered the canvas for a particular local cultural composition or text to be displayed on. It was this cultural expression that I attempted to read and interpret in my role as a researcher. In the following section, I describe my engagements in the field, their ethical implications and my ways of encountering and processing them, largely by thinking about what it means to ‘do’ ethnography.

Observatory, my home

At the time of conducting the research, I had been a resident in Obz for most of my five years in Cape Town. It was also the first place I knew upon arriving in South Africa for an internship at the local newspaper Obslife in 2010. The place is thus part of me and I am part of it. ‘Doing ethnography’, ‘doing ethics’ and making sense of ‘the Other’ thus also means making sense of myself in this context. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have criticised the fetishisation of ‘the field’ and addressed the blurredness of its clear-cut subject-object distinctions. What constitutes ‘the field’, the authors argue, has to be reconsidered (as well as the role of the anthropologist as an expert on a particular and distant ‘culture’) due to its problematic historical constructedness. However, no research ‘field’ is a closed and

isolated entity with an entrance and exit, particularly in the context of a globalising world, where the hegemonic separation between ‘the field’ and ‘home’ (promoting the conceptualisation of an inherently different ‘other’) has to be rethought. As argued by John and Jean Comaroff (1999), meaning-making is always a process of negotiation and contestation between the local and the global. In making sense of the life worlds of the ones ‘we’ (as anthropologists) study, our own assumptions have to be questioned and our familiar notions have to be de-familiarised (see Okazaki, 2003).

I consider ‘doing’ fieldwork in what I understand to be my home largely to have been an advantage. In challenging the familiar and reflecting on not-too-distant memories of how I learned to be in this space and of acquiring social and cultural competences in this context, I also learned more about my surroundings as well as about myself in relationship to them. For me, the process of engaging with cultural intimacy in this context had been a fairly recent one (see Collins and Gallinat, 2010), and my memories of them shifting over time (see Clifford, 1986) were still fresh. At the same time, I have another ‘home’ in Germany and experiences through travelling that I can draw upon in cautious cultural comparisons. This ethnography can thus also be considered somewhat multi-sited - as including different perspectives and combining an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ point-of-view.

Reflexivity

Conducting research on crime and its perceived presence in Obz was challenging in different ways. I often experienced the constant exposure to people’s fears and traumata over the months in the field as emotionally straining. Being not particularly technologically up-to-date, I was grateful to find out halfway through my fieldwork that the ONW WhatsApp group, a persistent and steady reminder of such fears and traumata, can be muted. After my time in the field as a researcher had ended and my lease in Obz had expired, I found my moving to a quieter

area in town to be a relief from the inner tensions that had built up over time. In this case, a physical break with ‘the field’ and the data collection process felt like a healthy step. However, I still have strong ties to the field – in the form of friendships and intense memories. I will thus never be able to cleanly sever myself from my field study.

Complex for me was also the circumstance that Obz was the field for my Honours dissertation topic as well. When I was exploring the daily lives of foreign male sex workers through an NGO in the area called SWEAT (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce), I ended up spending most of my time outside, for instance in urban parks. Most of the men I worked with were homeless and bridged the precarities of their daily lives by finding ways to ‘make due’. Judging from my experiences in the ONW, all of the men I worked with would likely be considered ‘dodgy’ and ‘suspicious’. I had an experience when I was patrolling with Richard, who was emphasising his no-nonsense-policy by addressing people he envisaged as suspicious. After a while of scanning the neighbourhood in this manner I recognised a man I had seen at SWEAT before without having properly introduced ourselves to one another. I got tense and actively tried to engage Richard in a conversation and thereby managed to prevent him from confronting the man and exposing me as treacherously ‘working for the other side’ – which is how I felt in this moment. Apart from the tapestries of the subject of fearing crime itself – the lack of emotional distance to my topic of choice and often to my informants as well as to my field (and home) was, at times, difficult to manoeuvre. I found the routine of sitting down and typing my field notes to be very helpful in acquiring a more distanced view.

Telling stories

Essentially, ‘doing’ ethnography is creating fiction or, as Clifford (1986) put it, ‘partial truths’. Stories of people in a particular cultural context are constructed, based on what can be observed and what can be told. How and what can be taken from

observations and interviews may be considered a fabrication of realities. These ethnographic fabrications themselves are based on fabricated cultural realities. In the context of my research, for example, particular notions of a 'suspect' were cultivated and became part of embodied behaviour in Observatory, consequently shaping relationships and spatial realities. What is more, I found selves in the role of the 'patrollers' to be constructed in certain ways. The problem lies not in ethnography not fitting an easy and binary category of being either 'scientific' or 'fictitious'. It lies in telling 'a single story', as novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009) has warned³⁰. There may be a violence inherent to the construction of what it means to be a person in any form. However, telling multiple stories and offering more than one simplifying voice to a person makes it apparent that 'our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories' (Adichie, 2009). Translating 'culture' (see Asad, 1986) is not an easy task. Reading and re-inscribing meanings is not just a subjective and, as I have pointed out, a potentially dangerous endeavour. I have grappled with this throughout the process of writing and in my attempts to show different facets of the individuals worked with. When introduced, the descriptions of characters seem categorical, simple and do not do justice to the colourfulness of individual experience. In extending these 'simple' understandings of people in the suburb as patrollers throughout this book, I have attempted to offer a glimpse beyond the potentially confining written word.

The power of ethnography

Clifford (1988) has put into question what he considers to be an 'automatic authority' taken up when writing on 'others'. The process of writing was historically considered separate from

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https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

the anthropologist's fieldwork, implying the emotional distance and dissociation from the field and reinforcing the ethnographer's authoritative standing as an outsider describing the foreign. While this is hardly possible even when the 'field' and 'home' are geographically disconnected, it is much less possible in my context. I am still very much emotionally invested in 'my field' – not least because the stories and experiences shared with me have become a part of me. I believe that the stories I shared and the time I spent listening and accompanying will also leave their marks in some way because, to stress this once more, fieldwork is not a liminal activity. I must acknowledge the power inherent in writing down my 'knowledge' of the subject in a scholarly fashion. Arguably, the written word will last longer than memories and may have a wider impact. I felt this thought resting heavily on me in the process of writing and I therefore wrote this account with much care and great appreciation for the opportunity (as it is not only a burden) to offer an insight into human life worlds that may be helpful in understanding particular phenomena, such as the fear of crime, a, little better in other contexts.

During my fieldwork, I found myself often feeling powerless, particularly at the beginning and during the difficult process of finding people in the suburb who saw the benefit of socialising with me over a longer time period and of continuously sharing their stories. After I made some friends in the field, I felt others who seemed to remain sceptic towards me to begin tolerating my persistent presence at meetings and bigger patrols. I felt dependent on people in the suburb during this time, which I consider to be a good thing. It does not only diffuse the often taken-for-granted power coming to the fore where an ethnographer collects information, but also made me appreciate the trust put towards me as a person and judge of how to use this information offered to me wisely. In line with Gupta and Ferguson (1997), I see place, identity and power to be in a constant process of negotiation. A lot of different factors are at play at the location from which anthropological

knowledge is constructed, which do not always remain the same over time and involve a lot more than the notion of the powerful ethnographer as storyteller reveals. However, at the end of the day, the task of weaving identities and subjects into a comprehensive account is mine and mine alone.

Being a woman who was considered to be young by my participants (I was 27 years old at the time) and being from Germany were facets of my positionality in the field that I, overall, experienced as advantageous. I think that my being considered foreign and a young woman invited for people who seemed to perceive some of my questions as unnecessary to still put an effort into answering them elaborately. By some of my informants, I was thought of as someone who can be taught and even the question of 'who is suspicious' would be attempted to be answered, even though most of the ONW patrollers seemed to think that this was a rather silly question. Yet, they struggled to phrase an unambiguous answer. It should also be mentioned that the circumstance that some of my informants turned out to be very supportive and keen to teach me sometimes seemed to attract inquisitive looks in the neighbourhood. I felt largely accepted as a researcher in this context and my presence was tolerated, even though the benefits of my being there appeared to sometimes be questioned. Allan, who will be introduced shortly and who holds a position of power in the suburb, appeared a little disconcerted when I started coming to his office frequently and having long conversations with his subordinate Richard, even though he had expressed my being welcome there before. There were what I would describe as 'normal' tensions of this kind which, nevertheless, did not prevail or dominate my fieldwork.

Becoming part of the field and negotiating roles within it

The challenging of terms such as 'objectivity', 'neutral observer' and 'science' with terms like 'poetics', 'play' and 'process' deriving their meaning in opposition to them, was part

of the performative turn in anthropology, which, as Conquergood (1989) argued, paved the way to understanding societies and selves and constructed and reconstructed. What is more, human realities were starting to become acknowledged as being fabricated, invented and imagined and cultures as being made or even 'made up'. I sometimes felt, more or less, like part of my field, but the intimacy of some relationships that unfolded made it difficult for me to remove myself emotionally from it. My whole body became part of the stories shared with me during patrols, meetings and get-togethers. It also became part of the strategies used in combating vulnerability. Reading the long threads of the WhatsApp chat groups and thus being forced to imagine 'suspects' day in and day out made this notion of corporeal intertwinedness even more dominant. The descriptive chat messages were also a constant reminder that I was part of the process of profiling and confining bodies in the neighbourhood. In the same way that others in the organisation did, I had to negotiate my personal needs, objectives and comfort zones when getting together with other members. I also had to continuously re-establish my position as a researcher. While most of the people that became a part of the research repeatedly asked me how my research was going, confirming awareness of my role as a researcher, the intimacy of some relationships made a clear disentangling of myself from my field experiences impossible.

As an ethnographer, I was interrogating how performance in the suburb reproduces, legitimates, upholds, challenges and critiques or subverts ideologies (Conquergood, 1989). Having become a somewhat ambiguous performer myself, I used the time that it took me to type out my notes and to fabricate this dissertation to also reflect on my being part of constructed realities and of also being in the position to question them –as most people I met did in different ways as will become clear. Performance is a site of struggle where competing interests intersect and different viewpoints get articulated (Conquergood, 1989). My roles as a friend, researcher and patroller shifted

gained dominance over one another in different situations, as did the roles of my informants. Even though we shared stories with each other and started to build mutual trust, stories that served for my informants to construct themselves in particular ways as patrollers of the neighbourhood surfaced frequently. The aspect of performance was thus not only used as an analytical concept in this dissertation, but was also part of the process of collecting data and being in the field.

Patrolling as a research method and way of embodying suspicion

Deciding to render the fear of crime the focus of my study seemed an easy choice, as it was an aspect of the city that has interested me from the moment I arrived in Cape Town, specifically from the moment that I had to unlock a security gate to then lock myself into a building designed to be a human cage, supposedly to make me feel ‘safe’. Having lived in Cape Town for years, I got somewhat used to the living behind bars, but not quite to the idea of it. News stories and conversations with people about different crime incidents have put the constantly hovering danger of becoming a victim to crime on my sensory and embodied map of living in the southern suburbs of Cape Town – ironically one of the safer geographic locations of Cape Town with regards to violent crimes. Traumatising incidents and the fear-provoking stories can have a deep impact on one’s embodied behaviour and linger as an atmosphere of uncertainty. An embodiment of suspicion will also impact ways of engaging with one’s environment and the people inhabiting it. It was such an incident (followed by a few other ones that I considered to be ‘less traumatising’) that made me realise that my way of moving about had changed and that my comfort and ability to inhabit a space without the worry of being approached in a negative way or being disturbed at any given moment had been severely disrupted.

Nevertheless, upon accepting the idea of conducting research on the ONW as an institution emerging from the

anticipation of crime, I immediately felt the urge to distinguish myself from the group. I remember declaring the act of actively searching for crime and potential criminals to be ‘a little absurd’ in a conversation with my supervisor before I started networking and before my first patrol in the streets of quaint and busy Obz. My first outing made the idea of patrolling as a coping mechanism in response to a constant exposure to the idea of crime more accessible to me. Walking the neighbourhood with my informants also made it clear to me that patrolling is a rather complex social process in which individual needs and group dynamics have to be reconciled. As a performance, patrolling involves the cultivation of the persona of a patroller, as well as the fabrication, invention, imagination and construction of the human realities around it. Patrolling as an act and strategy is not only central to being someone ‘watching’ the suburb – as also becomes clear in the discussions in the ONW meetings as well as in the Obsid meetings. It also became key in my researching an embodiment of suspicion in Obz. I believe that, in the process of ‘walking and talking’, I managed to collect data that sit-down interviews could not have generated. In walking the streets of Obz, a perceived ‘air of violence’ is addressed, processed and rather actively challenged. Through walking with the patrollers, my own illusions of me having a uniquely reflective and rational approach in coping with my own fears and trauma also became challenged. I consider the processes of walking, talking, watching and reporting to be ways of dealing with uncertainties and insecurities. This poses the question of how precisely coping with uncertainty becomes embodied practice and of what is to be found on the opposite end of this form of personal empowerment: the idea of a ‘suspect’.

Contextualisation through Participant Observation

The patrols offered one way for me to participate and observe the routines of people who have made the watching and re-mapping of the neighbourhood (in terms of crime and other ‘unusual’ activities) part of their routines. When walking with

just one or two other people, usually my main informants Christina and Richard, rather intimate conversations about life, relationships, fears and loneliness would evolve. The routine of walking, watching others, observing and conversing created a relaxed atmosphere and offered me insights that formal interviews might not have had. The bigger groups, organised by Luke, were much less intimate and Luke in particular did not share much about his personal life. The conversations focused around how the ONW could be improved, how more people can be motivated to patrol, the role of the various social forums in Obz and the effectiveness of the police, particularly the role of Constable Brett Daley, responsible for the operations in Obz but stationed at the Woodstock police station two suburbs further. However, the ONW environment is overall a place where people do socialise. Amber, for instance, lived by herself and explained that, as a woman, she finds the ONW patrols to be a good way of meeting and getting to know people living around her and thus feeling safer. The monthly meetings offered a good opportunity for me to observe vivid discussions as more people (non-patrollers and even non-members with an interest in crime developments) would be present in the local Community Centre. The circumstance that people of different roles in the community were present gave me a better insight into conflicting opinions and approaches when it comes to coping with insecurities. Present and contributing are police constables, the local security manager as well as the operations director of the Obsid, frequently the editor of the local newspaper Obslife, the head of the Observatory Civic Association (*OCA*) and the head patrollers of the four active sectors (see appendix).

Other formal meetings like the ones of the local security council, discussing an improvement of security strategies in Obz, offered another way for me to observe and experience what is of concern to the people who are (and some of them have been for a long time) key in introducing changes and initiatives that aim to render Obz a safer space. This was very

important in the process of collecting data as it helped me understand the kinds of information that reaches different people through different channels. It also helped me see who has a voice when it comes to determining what is good for the neighbourhood.

Getting a grip of the grittiness of the everyday: semi-structured interviews and life histories

Semi-formal interviews with many different individuals on living and being in Obz contributed to my set of qualitative data. Most of the people I conversed with had been exposed to some form of crime or assault and reported for these experiences to have affected them more or less drastically. Surprisingly, although many of those instances had happened in Obz, they did not necessarily associate this particular place with crime but rather saw the need to develop strategies of security depending on the specific space one inhabits. This alerted me to the fact that I, a foreigner who has spent five years living in Obz, link my experiences to this particular place as it is where my notion of corporeal security was under attack for the first time. Even though I am aware that the less violent crimes also manifest in locally specific ways, to me it is the place where something happened to me in the past and where something might happen in the future. Life histories of various people helped me to keep Cape Town and South Africa as a broader context in mind and to focally break away from my personal, narrowed perceptions. My informants' stories of moving around to live in different communities and of having been exposed to drastic (and not all necessarily crime-related) ruptures in life generally helped me to understand the embodied strategies of coping with crime as rather pragmatic (even if not always conscious) result of various traumatic experiences.

Analysing data from the WhatsApp and Google chat groups, Facebook and newspapers

Only about 10% of the members of the ONW go out on patrols and physically walk the local streets. Some might do the watching and reporting from their living room windows; others may observe their surroundings closely on their way to the supermarket. Most of the complaints and comments that are posted in the Google Group and on Facebook are formulated by people who do not take part in the patrol walks, most of whom I never encountered. They do, however, actively contribute to channels of information that form part in the shaping of particular kinds of realities that have to be engaged with by each individual in their own ways. I thus consider these groups to be valuable sources of information and engaged with their content. Even though I could not detail all of the numerous topics, the recurrent ones form part of this ethnography and informed my understanding of what is considered relevant and worth discussing for members of the groups. Members would use the Google Groups as a forum for discussion and often took advantage of a general complaint to address broader issues such as homelessness and social exclusion. The WhatsApp chat groups, on the other hand, are used as a channel for information to be acted upon quickly. It was thus discussed in the meetings how it could be maintained as such, how information could be channelled most effectively and how it could be kept uncluttered from chattiness and thus taken seriously as a communicator for specific, serious and urgent events. The WhatsApp chat groups were a rather new feature and formed the main medium of communication. I consider them crucial in engaging with uncertainties in Obz (the local paper *Obslife*, September edition 2015, reported that at least 40 streets had joined WhatsApp chat groups ‘to share alerts related to safety in their street, as well as other information’ in the first months of the ONW revival). Due to their significance in generating views and information broadly in the suburb, a whole chapter is dedicated to analysing WhatsApp chat groups as a medium and potential generator of

both, uncertainty and certainty. The local newspaper is mostly written and edited by Andre Smit, a man who does not render it a secret that crime and security are high on his agenda. His mother was killed in Obz a few years ago after having moved from the farm area in which his family grew up with very little criminal activity compared to Cape Town, especially with regards to violent crimes. As the editor of the local news and head of the Observatory Police Forum (OPF), his views have a considerable impact on a general sense of safety within the community. I therefore found it important to follow and analyse the local news content closely.

3.2. Conclusion: Learning to know and to see

In closing, the way I made sense of fear and vulnerability in the suburb was guided by an attempt to combine an emic and etic lens. I attempted to include the processes of interpretation and grappling with the space that I experienced during the months of doing research in this ethnography. In order to reconcile binary concepts of ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘science’ and ‘art’, I included what I found to be shared concerns connecting me and my informants, differing traumas and ways of seeing the world as well as shifting fears and comfort zones. Overall, I seek to offer not a complete picture of how vulnerability to crime is dealt with in the suburb but one giving the reader an opportunity to, after having read it, put this ethnography aside with a sense of having gained an insight into the complexities of the social phenomenon analysed – and with additional questions and strings of thoughts to be spun further. As became clear through my discussions of the ethics of researching the vulnerability to crime and the methodologies employed, my body played a big part in conducting research and collecting data on people looking for threats to the community. In becoming part of the ONW and patrolling with others, bodies, stories and movements started mingling and merging and became part of me. The main

argument of this dissertation is that suspicion is cultivated, embodied and performed. I thus also have to acknowledge that I myself was 'doing' anthropology in this context as a performance. Not only did I find myself developing my scholarly persona in gaining acceptance as a researcher in the field, I was also constructing myself as a patroller and thus as part of the organisation. Here, performance served as a lens and method. Turner defined humankind as 'homo performans', a culture-inventing and self-making creature (Turner, 1985:178). This also means that different constructions and inventions are not always harmoniously co-existing. Sharing experiences, walks and stories rendered me a part of the space researched and inextricably intertwined with the organisation and my informants.

Even having gained a somewhat emic perspective, my view of the world (as anyone else's) is not always consistent. My own and my informants' interpretations and understandings of the study context and its locatedness within a broader setting have multiple meanings and layers to them. I have attempted to render these visible by describing my own body-self in relationship with others and in the process of learning to interpret my being in this familiar space in new ways and specific roles. I thus deliberately included large, unedited chunks of my field notes in order for the reader to gain a better understanding of the process that was involved in gathering data and a selection of the very pieces this thesis is based on. In other words, I included my 'self' as an ethnographic resource in this account (Collins & Gallinat, 2010). As mentioned before and as has been clear in the field of Anthropology since Malinowski, subject-object distinctions are always blurred in conducting fieldwork and writing ethnography. I entered the field with particular memories and embodied knowledge that have become part of me. I wanted to include this knowledge to render it transparent how I learnt and acquired information in the field. Ideally, this will enable the readers to decide for themselves whether my conclusions and interpretations are appropriate.

The everyday texture and architecture of fear in the suburb: patrollers and their strategies and accessories of security

Abstract

In this chapter, I look at the ONW as a particular kind of community and at their crime prevention strategies as aiming to generate a notion of agency and security. This notion, I argue, is largely produced through the idea of relationality (Butler, 2011) with strategies and social networks being both, self-segregating and fostering relationships as well as a sense of belonging. The chapter draws on concrete strategies, employed to combat a perceived vulnerability to crime. 'The patroller' will be introduced as a form of human technology or software of surveillance, complimenting himself with a hardware of accessories and strategies of safety. It also draws on a noteworthy disharmony between notions of Obz as a physical space - in which suspicion is cultivated and becomes embodied, strategic practice – and as a metaphorical space (see Jensen, 2006) in which equality is expressively and creatively celebrated by many.

4.1. Introduction

Annually, the Streetopia festival is hosted in Obz, planned by the organisers of the spectacular AfrikaBurn art event, which attracts great numbers of people to the Karoo region of South Africa every year. In November 2015, the event turned suburban Observatory, snuggled against Table Mountain on the very southern tip of Africa, once again into a fantasyland of bristling streets, covered in creative crayon outbursts, outdoor art-exhibitions and screenings. The music and movements of the colourfully dressed up visitors and locals made the suburb seem like a surreal micro-universe – the kind of Wonderland Alice may slip in unpreparedly. At the same time that the space

underwent a metamorphosis without limits of the imagination, the ONW got ready and positioned themselves in the side streets to prevent criminally-minded opportunists from taking advantage of the carefree on that day. The planned transformation of the space into a land of fun and ease was only a temporary one and - by the people who inhabit the space on a daily and long-term basis - expected to be accompanied by the rather dark flipside of criminal activity. This chapter engages with the ways in which people in Obz and ONW members in particular engage with this 'dark flipside', namely a notion of insecurity and vulnerability to crime, on a daily basis by using different strategies.

4.2. The ONW patrollers

In order to show that the ONW and Obz are spaces that cannot uncritically be summarized as a 'community', implying homogeneity, I will introduce what I have found to be local key actors in the community when it comes to dealing with crime. While there is a need to establish a sense of relationality (Butler, 2011) through a shared notion of a 'suspect' in the group, members have different motivations and ways to engage with the 'phantom criminal' as well as with other members of the ONW. Richard, the security manager employed by the Obsid, liked to describe the ONW as a 'family'. While I am certain that not all of the members would share this notion, I found the ONW and local networks extending from it to resemble family structures as there were close ties and rather loose connections – conflicts as well as comforting intimacy. Whichever way one would want to put it, the members of the ONW (the active ones as well as the WhatsApp-only members) were looking for some form of comfort within this organisation and would understand their being involved with it as providing security of some kind.

Richard, not your 'superman'

Richard, had been employed by the Obsid since the

beginning of 2015. In his mid-50s, he tended to maintain his self-styled image as a retired military official with whom one cannot negotiate. His perfectly angular hair-cut, neatly kept moustache and his upright and determined way of walking, (almost marching) the streets underlined this image. At the same time, Richard opened up about his two failed marriages and his son who did not want to be in contact with him. He also told me about a period of homelessness in his life, which made me rethink the stories he would tell me about getting up extra early to remove shelterless people from the area (often whilst beating them, as he felt the need to emphasise). The day I met him on a patrol on a cold and dark Tuesday night in May in 2015, he exclaimed that the problem with Obz is that there are ‘too many liberals’ in the area who make his job impossible with their ‘pointless discussions’ and expressions of care for homeless people and other social outcasts. At the same time, Richard enjoyed being asked for help and would usually give me a summary of all the things he had accomplished in his role as a security manager since our last meeting. When Richard patrolled in a bigger group, he performed what he believed to be a ‘good patroller’: being emotionless while following procedures of removing unwanted bodies by any means. ‘Success’ was then reported in the WhatsApp chat group. However, walking with him when he was on his own offered a different experience as will become clear later on. Richard explained that people would ask him to be a superhero, expecting him to fulfil everybody’s conflicting needs, even though complaints were inevitable whether he went the ‘liberal’ route of treating unwanted characters nicely or whether he removed them in a violent way (these conflicts become, very clear in debates on to what extent vagrants should be attributed rights. See Chapter 7 for examples).

Christina, ‘moral backbone’ of the ONW

Christina, in her late 50s, was the secretary of the ONW, did all the administrative care-taking and was always approachable

for any kinds of concerns around safety, security and comfort. The first night Christina, Richard and I went patrolling as a small group (and separate from the usual Tuesday night patrol in our sector), she told me about her life by sharing one dreadful experience after the other. She revealed that she was sexually abused as a child, psychologically tormented by her mother when growing up, had a cheating husband and an addiction to crack, which she had overcome four years prior when she met her new husband, Ethan. I was uncertain of how to respond to these horrific stories, given that we had jumped straight from introducing ourselves during the last big patrol and the usual small-talk with the newcomers into the intimate biography of a woman who has not been able to break away from the emotional chaos and haunting insecurities of early childhood. Despite Richard's attempts to steer the conversation elsewhere, Christina sternly continued her narrative. All the trauma of her life stood in sharp contrasts to what she described as a pure love that she was experiencing for the first time in her life with Ethan. She admitted that she would not know what to do without him. I had many long chats with Christina about her depressions due to loneliness and financial struggles during patrols and over tea and chocolate at her place, where she would show me some of her paintings. Dealing with what she found to be negative spirits around her, she said, is the only way she sees herself continuing with life. Being actively involved in the ONW as secretary, she explained, made her feel as though she has a purpose. Christina would take a strong stance when it comes to patrolling. In the chat forums, she expressed her violent opposition to what she coined as 'couch-patrolling', that is the lack of physical presence in the local streets and focus on chat and e-mail groups instead - but not without sharp responses from members who felt the need to emphasise that deciding how to be part of this social group should constitute anyone's individual freedom. Local librarian Rosemary, for instance, commented that Christina should 'please be aware that there are numerous people who do things for the good of Obs. It may not be patrolling - but that

should not mean their efforts be negated’.

Richard told me that he and Christina would sometimes go out patrolling together when they feel restless and that they have ‘fun like children’. They would usually try to intercept the drug trade on the Main Road in front of a club infamously known as one of the drug hot-spots in the community. The closing of the ‘rouge club’ (as some ONW members called it) in October 2015 sparked a long thread of celebrative exclamations and praises directed to Constable Brett Nile in charge of the operation and local news editor Andre Smit, who had been reporting on the issue for years. Literally using their bodies as barriers, Richard and Christina would stop people from completing their transactions, as they then gleefully reported to me. Christina did however worry that drug dealers will harm or kill her one day, but said she could not help but getting involved and interrupting this spiralling misery of drug consumption and violence. Considering her involvement in the neighbourhood, I was surprised that she moved to a neighbouring suburb, saying that it was safer. When a growth was found in her jaw bone, Christina became less involved with the ONW, though she continued to fulfil her duties as the secretary of the organisation.

John, ‘father’ and technology expert of the ONW

John was seen as the father of the ONW. He coordinated events, prepared the two-way radios and facilitated the Facebook group. He can be considered the spiritual leader of the organisation who would know most members by name and encourage them to get involved in whichever ways they can. Originally from Holland, John is a retired, single man in his 60s who has spent more than half of his life in Cape Town. I would almost always see him with a broad smile on his face, whether he was chatting to me or other members. Before visiting him for the first time, Christina, with a smirk on her face, warned me to find an excuse to leave beforehand, lest I would be stuck for hours chatting with him. Much like for Richard and Christina, John emphasised being social to be what makes the group, its

purpose and the reason for his involvement. While Christina and Richard took patrols and meetings as individual opportunities to ward away the negative spirits around them, John liked the idea of a big family, a neighbourhood where everyone knows and supports one another. Coordinating the group seemed to give him purpose, even if he sometimes felt overwhelmed by the task. With an expression of exhaustion on his face he admitted that he often does not have the energy to do all the things on his bucket list. In the monthly meetings, John usually is cut short by chairperson Luke or other members who are keen to leave on time as Johns reports are not only long but also told with the slowness of somebody living the moment of a conversation.

Allan, head of Obsid and face of a new era

Allan was the new Obsid manager and considered a fresh, liberal wind in town. This is particularly true in comparison to Harry, who had held this position since the beginnings of the Obsid and was known as a rather difficult, conservative and pronouncedly manly character. I was told there used to be much friction between him and some of the older, men of the various local social committees with ‘personality conflicts’ being the main reason for this. Allan was a trained sociologist and came across as a likable character and genuinely interested in peoples’ concerns. He would not show reluctance when the proactive combating of social issues were debated. His communication skills became very apparent in the three Security Council meetings I attended in which a strategic plan was meant to be produced concerning what would happen with the current private security contract. Here, very concrete questions came to the table, for instance what kinds of cameras should be used to keep crime under surveillance; should private security patrol on bicycles or on foot; and how many vehicles are needed to cover ground effectively and attentively? The discussions were long and intense with perspectives clashing between local business owners, self-proclaimed humanists, Richard, ONW chair Luke and local news editor Andre Smit. For Allan, channelling the

sometimes heated communication and keeping the links with the ONW was an opportunity to promote progress in the suburb. He explained that ‘character-clashes’ should not be the centre of strategy-coordination meetings but that the focus should lie on finding solutions and look at issues from all possible angles.

Andre Smit, local news-maker

I have known Andre Smit and his family since 2010, which is when I did an internship for the local newspaper he was running. Andre is very passionate about crime prevention, particularly since the death of his mother a few years ago linked to a robbery. The focus of the newspaper, *Obslife*, is thus often fixed on issues of crime and what Andre considers to be the sources of crime – namely the drug trade in local ‘rouge clubs’ and neglected spaces such as the graveyard by the hospital on the other side of the Main Road, as he explained in a conversation with me and in local meetings. Andre would attend various meetings of local forums and was always up-to-date regarding the different projects. He attended these meetings as a concerned citizen but also as a man generating what he found to be important local news. In both roles, he also met with SAPS members for updates. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I learnt that Andre and his family had moved to another suburb not far from Obz, Pinelands, which is known to be a quieter family suburb.

Brett Nile, the sheriff in town

Brett was in his early thirties and the SAPS Constable responsible for the area. He had an aura that I would not quite interpret as calm or serious but rather as an expression of a connectedness to the situation he finds himself in. His dominant biceps, decorated with colourful tattoos and tightening his uniform as well as his gun, worn visibly on his hip, communicate a movie-like rawness. When I asked him if the visibility of the weapon may not cause someone to try and steal it, he responded: ‘Only if they want to have their arms broken’. Brett tried to

attend most of the monthly ONW meetings. 'No, not because I have to', he responded to my question over a coincidental encounter and coffee with me at a petrol station close to Obz. He wanted to have ties to the communities he oversaw and the exchanging of relevant information concerning crime helped him do his job, which he described as having the potential to impact society and change it for the better. He was assigned to Obz a few years prior and yet he did not choose the area, he said he liked it. Even though he would never want to live outside the Northern Suburbs where he was born and raised and where he experienced people to be more down-to-earth. Ever since the revival of the ONW and its attempts to establish a work relationship with the police, Brett had been celebrated and his efforts were widely acknowledged in the community. Every time he reported an arrest, the WhatsApp chat group members would respond with celebrative icons and express their gratitude, to which he usually responded: 'Just doing my job'. He would criticise the 'justice system' and was always quick to, in very polite language, respond to any complaints posted in the group, stating that he will go to the scene in question or, alternatively, send his colleagues there to help. Even when he was not on duty, Brett made himself available via WhatsApp and apologised when his response took longer than a few minutes.

Amber, the 'hen in the basket'

Apart from Christina, Amber was one of the few other frequent female street patrollers and seemed enjoy joking around with the guys. When I asked her why she had decided to join the organisation she explained that, as a single woman who lives by herself, she generally does not feel safe. The idea of knowing some of the neighbours around her eased her anxieties, especially after having experienced two house break-ins in the neighbourhood. When I enquired more about what it is that makes her feel insecure, she insisted that she is actually was not that worried. Amber, in her mid-forties, was a born-and-bred Cape Townian and had lived in Observatory for most of her life.

However, she said, she would prefer living in the city centre, which she considers to be safer and having a different atmosphere than the suburb. In town, she said, one feels as though it is possible to just walk home at night.

Shania, the communicator

Shania has a soft voice and a slow, reflected-sounding way of speaking with a slight American accent. She coordinated the communication amongst those members who did not feel confident or comfortable using WhatsApp and Facebook and contributes gently, but frequently and often challengingly to the discussions at the ONW meetings. Her focus often was on making communication work in a way that members did not feel overwhelmed by the sheer mass of crime-related information in the groups – but without censoring people or denying them comforting chitchat. She suggested that there be groups in which people could chat about a range of topics as well as one that was a forum communicating immediate threats (some sectors had already arranged for this, though sometimes there were disagreements of what information was ‘relevant’, ‘important’ or what constituted ‘chitchat’).

Peter, the ‘gun nut’

Peter was often referred to as a ‘gun-nut’ and admitted that he never went out patrolling without being fully-gearred. He patrolled by himself if he was not accompanying Officer Brett Nile and said he liked to do things ‘his way’. His day job was body-guarding a local politician of the Democratic Alliance (DA). His comments in the meetings were often framed as ‘pragmatic’ solution-making as opposed to having prolonged discussions and attempting to be ‘politically correct’. In the monthly meetings, he often surrounded himself with members who would, like him, also use Afrikaans as a language of choice.

Luke, the strategist

Luke was the unchallenged chairperson of the ONW and

showed skill in presenting and summarizing issues in a calm and clear manner and in facilitating and moderating discussions without upsetting any members. He was also one of the people insisting on keeping with the time schedule of the program that is usually sent out by Christina roughly a week before the monthly meetings. Regardless, meetings always exceed the allocated time frames, leading to several of the attendants leaving quietly and long before the closing statements whilst others kept the discussions going by continuously providing new ideas and discussion topics, which Luke then tried to channel and contain.

Members of the ONW had different motivations for being part of the organisation and different ways to contribute to it. Luke, Brett and Matthew (all amongst the more frequent physical street patrollers) were all fathers of under-two-year-old babies and would engage with patrolling as a way of protecting their families. Even though the three of them got along well, joked around and passed time seemingly easily, patrolling was more of a duty than a social event. The different characters of patrollers make it clear that the ONW is not a homogenous space and that the subtle ties of power (Foucault, 1978), spun between individuals in an attempt to combat crime as a group, form particular synergies, leading to the cultivation and embodiment of ‘suspicion’ in distinguished ways. In the following section, I provide an extract of a monthly ONW meeting that I attended in order to outline the dynamics involved in strategizing within the organisation and the conceptualisations of crime involved in it.

4.3. Negotiating fear and idealised notions of local realities

Field notes from meeting on 23.09.2015

[...] Nineteen of us came to the monthly ONW meeting this Wednesday evening and we were seated at 6.35pm, after Luke had encouraged us to move conversations from outside the building to the classroom-sized room of the former school building (now constituting the community hall) and to then

quieten down. Luke greets everyone from the front of the room with the blackboard in his back after Christina has finished taking down the names of all attendees.

The first item on the agenda, raised by Richard, is the fencing off of what are speculated to be escape routes of criminals, such as the railway line. 'But we as a community', Richard says, 'have to complain until this thing gets done!' After his mentioning of other current criminal 'problem zones', such as my street corner where Cook Street and Polo Road meet and where people have repeatedly been robbed in the street (a crime that is supposedly related to the minibus taxis that take this route as one commentator claims), local news editor Andre announces that he has something to share. Waiting for all eyes to have settled on him, he calmly starts explaining that the Obsid has to be backed by the Observatorian citizens. After all, 'there are limits to what they can do!', he adds. Murmurs of agreement are complimented with comments from different corners of the room about the responsibility of citizens in a community. After a few minutes, Luke sees it necessary to continue with the proceedings and moves to the next item on the agenda: WhatsApp chat groups as a channel of communication.

The groups are mushrooming with membership numbers increasing on a weekly basis. Additionally, new street-based WhatsApp groups are being formed frequently due to a perceived increase of crime levels in the neighbourhood. The question of what the impact of the technology on the community may be is raised by Luke. He asks whether there should be a prioritizing of certain kinds of messages to make the groups more effective as a channel of communication. This would involve dividing them into 'cbit-chat groups', as Luke calls them, and the ones with information the police and Obsid would have to react to quickly. Shania raises her hand and explains that the groups make her anxious and that some people in her street feel the same way. They have thus implemented an email system to avoid a flood of information that one might feel overwhelmed by. The street group also got together to carefully discuss what kinds of information is useful and important and what subheadings should be used to indicate which messages are essential to be read by everybody. Conversations spread through the room about what may constitute 'too much information' and what may foster anxiety. Luke once again asks everyone to quieten down and get back to the discussion points scheduled.

Having the floor as the technology expert of the group, John starts to elaborate on aspects such as the introduction of a new cell phone program called 'Zello' that may add to the existing two-way radio system in the near future. He also talks about the popularity of the ONW Facebook page (even though a large part of likes are from non-locals, as John identifies) and the channelling of different radio networks for the various private security workers hired in the area into the same radio network. John takes his time with each of these thematic items and chooses his wordings carefully whilst gesturing slowly. His thick glasses and wide toothy smile give all of his comments a certain intensity. After people have started impatiently shifting in their chairs, John is cut short by Luke, who starts talking about the lack of active patrollers. Roughly 8-15 out of the 107 members are actually patrolling the street, he estimates. A young man offers the explanation that this may be due to a general association of the group with a certain type of aggressive, white, middle-class character that many people in Observatory might not want to be associated with. Some nod in agreement and comments are made that, essentially, the ONW is understood as a bunch of white guys spying on their black neighbours.

It is getting late and I am pushing myself up in my seat, regaining some energy through the lively discussion. Richard, who is sitting next to me, is rolling his eyes and shaking his head, as though just one of the two ways of expressing disagreement would be insufficient to communicate his stance on the topic. 'The organisation should communicate that they are accessible and welcoming' flows as a comment from one end of the room while others add 'yes, we should brand patrols in a way that makes people realise that they are about caring for the community and nothing else'. Shania carefully suggests that this may be true but that the factor of racial profiling is something that is not irrelevant and that should be negotiated carefully.

Simon, head of the Observatory Civic Association (OCA,) talks about the role of the neighbourhood watch as a social movement and others suggest that the ONW ought to be visible and that the essence of it should be actual social interaction in some form, as opposed to staying behind closed doors and communicating over the phone. Richard chants that it is important that the community spirit is bigger than crime in order to fight it. Murmurs and separate little conversations have, by now, spread across the whole room, offering a bulging background noise.

I realise that my notebook and pen had flopped into my lap and that, in

the comfort of the slightly raised noise level, my thoughts had drifted to a distant memory of watching 'life of Harry' an episode of the British BBC sketch comedy of the 70s Monty Python. In my head I replayed the scene of a group of men, sitting around a table and continuously exclaiming that 'now is a time to act' and not to talk and discuss without progressing into action. When a young woman comes running into the tent and confronts them with an emergency that actually required their action, the men proceeded strategising and intellectualising while the woman with increasing desperation tries to explain to them that the solution is easy: getting up of from their chairs and stopping the injustice from happening through physical interruption. 'Yes, yes' the men agree while still sitting and now starting a discussion on the importance of actions, while the woman throws her arms in the air in disbelief and eventually leaves the tent. In the satire, theories turn out to be insufficient and too abstract to apply to reality. In the ONW, the 'doers' and the ones getting caught up in discussions seem to occupy similarly opposite camps than in the movie scene. [End of field notes].

Although it was not my first monthly ONW meeting, it held a defining moment of my fieldwork. I started experiencing the meeting and the getting together of the different patrollers as a very particular formation of a group of people that have a number of things in common, such as a shared notion of there being a threat to their well-being that compromised their living-and-being in the neighbourhood (this, as will become clear in the chapter to follow, is tied to a particular, cultivated and embodied notion of 'the suspect'). At the same time, there was a routine of dissecting and discussing items on the agenda beyond exhaustion (at least that seems to be the perceptions of some members). As a specific community, members of the ONW considered themselves ethically bound to the community norms (Butler, 2011). For Peter, the 'gun nut', for instance, the democratic decision of disassociating the organisation from the carrying of weapons led to him patrolling by himself, which he claimed to prefer. When the discussion was still fresh, he commented in the Google chat group:

[...] been doing that for the past 15 years (doing things on my own), it's just nice to be in a group, getting to know other people and so on....but yes, have been doing [things on my own].

When 'dwellings' were found to have been built during a patrol I attended, very near the big intersection on the Main Road, some members of the ONW were outraged and claimed that 'illegal structures' would negatively impact the suburb. In an email-thread on the topic, other members posed the question of what constitutes an 'illegal structure'. The various discussions show that, within the group, what is 'normal' and 'ethical' – what shall be protected and secured and what poses a threat to ideal notions of this community had to undergo a decision-making process, leading to distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of the group that many tried to avoid. The 'norms and ethics' of the ONW needed to be secured in order to draw the defining lines of the group and the ways in which people understand themselves in this context. These lines also defined limits of moral and physical support.

In order to relate to other peoples' issues, social groups valorise nearness as a condition for encountering and knowing the other, and thus figure ethical relations as binding upon those whose face they could see, whose name they could know and pronounce, those they could already recognize, whose form and face is familiar, as Butler (2011) eloquently put it. In Obz, it was not just physical proximity that triggered solidarity. The sufferings of Warren, the young man who could be seen shooting heroin a hundred metres from my house on the Main Road and who was known to most of the community by name, are not the same sufferings than those of a person who may be accepted as a member of the ONW group, someone who has formal accommodation somewhere in the suburb. The struggles of social outcasts were noted and were reflected upon as human tragedies by some members of the group. They did, however, not trigger the same reactions as events that emphasise a corporeal fragility shared by everybody in the suburb. When on

patrol in a bigger group, walking the darker parts of the suburb near the train line, we passed through a little street behind the local supermarket when John pointed out one of the houses. 'Have you heard?' he asked, recounting the story of a woman who was stabbed multiple times in her home by an intruder. Reportedly, she had survived the attack.

This made me aware of the power that the proximity of trauma can carry. Locally experienced trauma, especially in a context where people are relatively safety-pampered and well equipped for the event of a criminal intrusion, can have a far reach and constitutes a reminder of the threat the community believes to be exposed to on a daily basis. Like Butler (2011), I would like to make a distinction here between *precariousness* - the corporeal vulnerability shared even by the comparably privileged, and *precarity* - the particular vulnerability imposed on the poor and disenfranchised. In Obz, the fragility of bodies differentiated and equalised at the same time. While all bodies may be somewhat bullied by injury, suffering, and death (*precariousness*), some bodies are more exposed to *precarity*, while others are more protected. Butler argues that *precariousness* is shared by everyone, while *precarity* is distributed unequally (Butler, 2011:25). Singular tragic events, like the ones I was repeatedly confronted with, locally served as a way to emphasise the *precariousness* of those recognised as community members and as a way of justifying the social exclusion of those whose lives were already severely shaped by *precarity*.

It is the ways in which themes behind routinised practices and agenda items were processed and dissected that made the ONW as these are not just items but relate to practices of strategic spatial exclusion. Simple distinctions between bodies may be the basic principle of the ONW (bodies looking for bodies that are somehow different), but they were not internalised without being philosophically challenged. There was a dominant wish for shared community spirits that kept being expressed in the various social forums available to members,

without discussions leading to an actual increase of street patrolling and the physical getting-together as a group. The main space in which feelings of precariousness were shared was a virtual one. However, the circumstance that the monthly meetings were well attended and fuelled by spirited discussions shows that the need to feel related was accommodated in ways that did not necessarily require the embodiment of the atypical patroller (described further in chapter 3).

Thus far, I have introduced the ONW as a distinct kind of community and ‘the patroller’ by looking at aspects of relationality (Butler, 2011). ‘The patroller’ emerging from this particular cultural space can be seen as the hardware in combating crime upon which corporeal strategies and technologies (as a software) can be developed. The next section of the chapter outlines the strategies, technologies and accessories of safety and security in the neighbourhood.

4.4. Strategies and accessories of safety and security

Part of the everyday routines in the suburb was locking up everything that can be locked (houses, cars, etc.) and in many cases activating alarm systems. While this behaviour is not specific to Observatory or even Cape Town or South Africa, having a car alarm, gear-lock, engine immobilizer or automatic door-lock systems I was not exposed to before coming to this city. Although many modern cars now have alarm systems in Germany as well, they seem more an addition to a sense of safety for the ones than can afford it than part of a concrete strategy shaping everyday lives. As far as I am aware, no one I know in Germany ever had a car or apartment/house broken into (apart from my mom’s remote garden house). At the local Security Council meetings I attended, the latest technologies in cameras were discussed as well as the advantages of them being movable. Crime hotspots that can be predicted for the near future based on crime data generated by a new computer programme that

Richard was learning to use can be monitored by the literal following of crime patterns. It was surprising to me that there were no concerns voiced with regards to the privacy of locals who would also be observed and ‘caught’ on camera³¹. Leaving things behind in the car was considered a mistake by the patrollers and was almost seen as an invitation for a break-in. It was also considered something that foreigners tend to do who are less aware of certain risks or have not embodied and cultivated suspicion to the same degree. ‘Educating’ foreigners in crime patterns and how to counteract them was something frequently mentioned to me as a critical task in preventing incidents. Electric fencing and high walls (the latter of which, Richard claimed, actually hinder by-passers to get involved if somebody breaks into a house) are the common sight in Cape Townian suburbs like Obz, announcing that people here may not be merely architecturally equipped and ready to combat crime. The clear lines, metaphorically and physically drawn between private and public space, become strongly emphasised in an attempt to create a safe space. Alarm systems, linked to security companies and standard in many households may even be enhanced with additions by individuals. John, for instance, arranged glass bottles by his door so that, at night, he will be woken up by the sound of the bottles falling in case technology fails and the alarm system does not go off. It was also John who conducted a survey in the suburb, which showed that 60% of the neighbours in Obz did not have alarm systems or did not activate them. One person in the Google chat group circulated this information and it was interpreted as an invitation for thieves to choose this suburb in particular to break into houses. Another commentator responded that it is dangerous to blame victims of crime instead of the perpetrator.

³¹ I remember a lively and debate about state-surveillance in Germany, immediately sparked when cameras were planned to be put up in the city centre of Frankfurt a few years back.

Being alert and equipped

Being aware of the presence of others in the street was part of the 101 of being safe in the suburb, as suggested to me by other patrollers. The feeling one has when walking down a street towards another person being present very much depends on their appearance, gender and way of walking. Christina described a situation in which there were three young, ‘dodgy looking’ men walking towards her in one of the small streets in the suburb. When they appeared to be splitting up so as to attack her from different angles, she ran as fast as she could. Those young men, she thought, were following a crime-pattern or strategy that she reacted to by making a fast, intuitive decision. Having identified the men as ‘suspicious looking’ to a degree that she was certain a physical closeness would lead to an attack, she saw only one strategy of prevention: running.

Many people I talked with had an accessory of choice to defend themselves in an attack. This can mean the holding of their house keys as a ready weapon or having a dog as both a walking companion and a noisy and aggressive response to perceived danger (with the dog’s embodiment of suspicion being cultivated by his or her owner and thus somewhat mirroring it). The use of classified weapons was a hot topic of discussion in the group in June/July of 2015, leading to a vote in an ONW meeting deciding on whether they are appropriate to be carried when on patrol as an ONW member. Guns in particular were passionately opposed by some members of the group, and many expressed their opposition in form of email commentary. The argument that fire weapons increase the risk of violent conflicts instead of reducing them and a discomfort of being associated with an armed group of people were voiced. The final vote on the topic in the not particularly well-attended meeting resulted in 65% voting against the carrying of firearms. Having the ‘right’ pepper spray was also topic of discussion in the WhatsApp chat groups with Constable Brett ending up promising Christina an effective spray with which it is supposed to be easy to immobilise an attacker without accidentally spraying oneself with the pain-

inducing liquid. Knives were also carried around by many. Less potentially harmful tools and mechanisms in engaging with perceived threats constitute the heavy, black two-way radios used by the ONW, the private security in the area and the police as well as the vests with the ONW logo on them. Signifying interconnectedness and quick, organised response, radios and vests are believed to scare criminals away or lead to them organising their criminal activity in a less visible (and thus reportable) manner. Even in the sanctity of the home, ready responses to crime are a matter of concern in the suburb. The local newspaper Obslife regularly distributed a list of numbers that can be called in case of an emergency. This list is attached to a magnet, which can be attached to a refrigerator for speedy access. The paper is distributed to every household with a Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking the person hired to deliver it and thus ensuring the reliable distribution of the rather crime-focused news to every local household.

Locking-off and locking-in

In this context, I found one particular Google chat group message quite interesting. Local librarian, Rose, suggested that the local dog park be double locked upon entering it, making it harder for an intruder to come in and giving the person who had gained access to the park after collecting the key at the Obsid more time to react and ‘make a plan’ to protect him- or herself. The message made me aware that access to the local dog park is limited to people deemed appropriate to enter it and occupy the fairly sparse and plain environment. The park is protected by a lockable fence but, it appears, it may be just another potential crime scene. Even though the message shared in the forum was not responded to (which is not unusual), it was a powerful reminder of how impactful the fear of crime can be for some individuals, even when attending to their everyday routines. What is more, while most ONW members and other inhabitants of the suburb might not share this particular fear of being

attacked while walking their dog in a plain, gated and locked environment, the publication and circulation of fears in the form of chat messages or through conversations renders these fears accessible (if not necessarily understandable) to a great number of people in the neighbourhood. Questions of the emotional impact of the routine of sharing should also be considered when thinking about the circulation of phone snapshots of criminal ‘suspects’ and the posting of numerous crime stories on a daily basis through the chat groups.

The threat of street crime and less recognised daily companions

The walk-home service provided through the *Obsid* by the local private security company constitutes an institutionalised initiative to ensure safety and is available throughout the night for those who want to be mobile after dark within the suburb without driving a car or hiring a taxi. By providing the company of young men for the way home (the security personal on the street can be described as male and in their 20s and 30s), bodies considered at risk to crime become freed from their corporeal constraints. Unsafe spaces suddenly become accessible - albeit not freely and only in the company of these uniformed men, on foot and with point of departure and destination being within the confines of the suburb. The irony that lies within this strategy of security is that the young men offering the service come from the outskirts of Cape Town, the township areas in which crime is thought to originate from³². This means that they have to confront their own ‘brothers’, as Sipho who works for the locally engaged security company explained to me. Sipho had only recently started working for the company, which meant travelling from Khayelitsha to Observatory daily. There are white people who commit crimes, he said. He heard of a man living close by (from where we were standing and talking) who was a paedophile. However, Sipho said he did not usually look

³² See, for instance, Seekings (1996) as local reference.

out for white people, as most criminals are black. It is not just ONW members and white suburbia in general that has internalised and perpetuates notions of males of colour from the outskirts of town as the most likely to be a criminal in Cape Town. The stigma is deeply embedded across what are conceptualised as inherently different sub-cultural islands of the city. As soon as Sipho and his colleagues stripped off their uniforms, and make their way back home, they may become categorised as ‘suspects’ themselves. The authority of their uniforms, further distinguishable with the emblem of the company, can no longer protect them from becoming victims to crime themselves. While the presence of the private security personal on a daily basis might not be considered effective in the combat of crime (many residents complain about their lack of motivation in doing their job), they do constitute a physical presence and represent a constant effort to actively meet crime in the suburb.

4.5. Conclusion

Levels of trust in fellow human beings are not the same everywhere. In 2015, eight prisons were closed in Holland³³, due to a lack of reported crime and criminals to incarcerate. At the same time, the closing of prisons in the country on the north-western edge of Europe can be understood as an expression of social trust. The confidence that levels of crime (which is the breaking of societal trust), will remain low in the near future are tied to an optimistic idea of sharing space. Throughout my fieldwork in Obz, I found there to be a very particular kind of social distrust prevailing and competing with the predominant wish to cultivate a community open to everybody. A recurring question for me was why some people, even though they may not actually go on patrols or prefer patrolling alone, would still

³³ <http://www.thedailystar.net/world/netherlands-close-8-prisons-lack-criminals-97480>

insist on going to the monthly meetings, which were mainly meant to serve as a platform for the main patrollers to provide feedback from their patrols with its minutes being circulated via email. The reason that the group had not entirely slipped into a virtual sphere was that there was a need to relate to neighbours on a physical level as well. The feeling that the ‘community spirit ought to be bigger than crime in order to fight it’ (as Richard suggested) was prevalent amongst my informants. While patrolling with a two-way radio is traditionally considered to be the main strategy in signalling a resistance to crime, practices of ‘talking crime’ and circulating a vast number of warnings and images are much more exhaustively practiced. With the WhatsApp chat groups consistently growing and people from outside the suburb also being part of the ONW Facebook group, the radius of ‘talking crime’ is considerable. The talk of crime in the different forums of social intercourse established for the organisation is sometimes ambiguous and often takes a philosophical turn. However, ‘talk’ solidifies in concrete practices, decisions and encounters of bodies within the suburb. The life worlds created through the group and its shared ‘ethics and norms’ (see Butler, 2011) carry the vision of a life in Obz that is more secure with this vision being central to this ethnography.

What was experienced as a peak of crime at the time of the research led to a rethinking of what has to be done to ensure safety for oneself and others and to an emphasis on particular practices and strategies of safety with the revival of the ONW serving as a testimony to this intention of ‘creating’ safety. The ONW thus offers an interesting case study in thinking about dealing with perceived vulnerability to crime in suburban Cape Town. The recent mushrooming of ONW WhatsApp chat groups and the constant circulation of ‘crime talk’ and pictures of ‘suspects’ somewhat conflict with the liberal, and bohemian image of the suburb with notions of Obz as a physical space - in which suspicion is cultivated and becomes embodied practice and part of a broader strategy – being in disharmony with

understandings of the suburb as a metaphorical space (see Jansen, 2008) - in which equality is expressively and creatively celebrated by many (for instance through various projects of integration involving people who are socially kept apart). As I have highlighted, the relatedness of individuals within the organisation is largely fostered by 'talking crime' and rendering experience immediate, combatable, sometimes visual, especially with the help of new technologies. At the same time, relationality (Butler, 2011) and patrolling as prime strategies of security also encourage practices of spatial exclusion that reproduce certain social spaces in Cape Town as reserved exclusively or for the privileged.

This chapter has shown how people in Obz and in the ONW relate and strategise with regard to safety and security. In the following chapters, the composition of relationships in the suburb remains relevant but the focus will extend to how these mould into the cultivation of notions of 'the suspect' (Chapter 2) and practices of patrolling – physically (Chapter 3) and virtually (Chapter 4). 'Being suspicious' and conceptualising 'the suspect' are interpreted as the creation of spaces in which security strategies are developed and self-segregation is administered (de Certeau, 1984). In so doing, I focus strongly on the life worlds that are created and nourished through corporeal practices of patrolling and 'chatting' as well as on the roles occupied within them.

The Phantom Suspect: Cultivating and embodying suspicion in Observatory

Abstract

The previous chapter introduced the ‘patrollers’ of the suburb and the different ways in which members of the community relate to practices of monitoring the streets, ‘talking crime’ and how social ties are established in Obz. This chapter explores the forms that suspicion assumes and how criminal threats are conceptualised, imagined and reacted to. I argue that patrolling the suburb as a safety strategy increases notions of agency not only through a sense of relationality (Butler, 2011) but also through embodied practices of patrolling. ‘Suspicion’, the motivating spirit to throwing on a bib and searching streets for criminals or checking the ONW group messages at home, is something that is learnt and cultivated; conditioning bodily experience in distinctive ways. As a cultivated phantom figure, ‘the suspect’ is seen as source of insecurities and a perceived vulnerability to crime. The chapter outlines the ways in which the ‘suspect’ is conceptualised and how particular understandings of the figure of ‘the criminal’ translate onto strategic and embodied practices of patrolling and monitoring the suburb.

5.1. Introduction

Within the practice of patrolling lies a core of social distrust, saturated with notions of individually experienced precariousness (Butler, 2016). Through the eyes of the patroller, every person encountered in the streets is identified as either a potential criminal or trustworthy individual with no intent to do any harm. Baier (1986) describes trust as the reliance on another person’s good will (and perhaps minimal good will). The very idea of combing the streets of an area for criminals implies that a) (some) people are easily identifiable as lacking good will and thus being a threat to oneself and b) that the self-declared patroller is trust-worthy and therefore acts as a moral compass

in identifying people as ‘suspicious’, sorting the social wheat from the chaff. Baier (1986:234) states that ‘We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted’. What I have described as an ‘air of violence’ so far is what has intrigued me to research social distrust and suspicion. In Obz, new social constellations and forms of trust evolve from institutionalised practices of patrolling the neighbourhood with notions of distrust and suspicion socially manifesting through the body – in the form of individual practice, shared group ideology and the phantomising of ‘the criminal’. The following section describes the cultivation and embodiment of suspicion through my own body in its engagement with other bodies in patrolling Obz and grapples with the question of who the sought after suspect actually is.

5.2. My first patrol

It is a cold and windy Cape Townian winter night and I scheduled my first patrol with ONW chairperson Luke for 9.30pm tonight. I was told via WhatsApp, that we would be joined by others. I am making a mental (and physical) note of the 11-hour shift at the call centre that I have tomorrow, for which I usually get up at 6am. The prospect of walking in the cold until 11pm is not very appealing at this very moment. However, this seems to be the only regular patrol taking place at the moment so I am just sitting on my bed, dressed in my warmest jacket and ready to be picked up by the group.

[Notes taken after patrol, late evening on the 30.06.2015]

After a little meet and greet we were finally walking the streets of Observatory and I was busy trying to strike up a conversation here and there in a casual manner. At the same time, I was trying to explain my intention of researching coping mechanisms as a reaction to being exposed to crime without making the group feel like a bunch of zoo animals being observed. Through all this, I forgot that we were actually on a patrol and not merely a

group of people taking a walk, chatting and getting connected. This suddenly changed when we reached the Main Road and passed a few seemingly drunk people, looking at us curiously. Most of us were wearing bibs, identifying us as the 'Neighbourhood Watch'. Some of us were also holding walkie-talkies in our hands. The dynamic of our group changed when Richard, the security manager of the area who had been talking about his work for most of the walk, identified a man in his late twenties or early thirties to be the suspect of a case of theft that occurred yesterday. We picked up our pace to catch up with him and dropped our conversations. I looked at Amber in search for instructions of what to do as I had no idea what the protocol in this situation is. 'What is going to happen now?', I asked her and she replied 'ahm, we're just going to follow him a little to see where he goes'. Richard spoke into his walkie-talkie, reaching out to the private security personnel he is supervising. I was surprised by the rush of excitement triggered by the abrupt change in dynamics. In the spur of the moment, I was keen to follow this 'suspicious' person, described as a 'Charly Male' ('Charly' being a synonym for the apartheid term 'Coloured') in red sneakers. I was suddenly very aware that being seen in the street as a unified group of people with common symbols and similar ways of walking was conveying a message to anyone we encounter and that were communicating and embodying a certain form of power even without actually interacting or interfering with a person or situation. Moving through the suburb in search for the same things seemed to be the only aspect differentiating us from any other group that may walk the same streets. This search for something initially abstract, the idea of there potentially being criminals wandering the streets, had more of an impact than I would have imagined. The ways in which we held ourselves as a group and our unified presence had an effect on the space we moved through, even if only for a short while, not just on our notion of purposefully and demonstratively being in these streets but apparently (telling from their curious reactions) also on the handful of people we encountered [End of field notes].

Thinking about the experience later at my home it became clear to me that patrolling is a rather complex social process. The ONW had just recently been revived because a considerable number of residents in Obz (more than 10%, judging from how many people initially signed up as members) considered it

necessary and the private security strategy established through the government subsidised local improvement district (Obsid) was considered ineffective in reducing crime. This means that all of the patrollers (except for Amber, who was active in the previous ONW called 'Obswatch') were in the process of learning how to patrol, learning where and what to find 'suspicious' and worth reporting. It also means that a concrete understanding of the cultural essence and transformative purpose of the group was in the process of being negotiated – and would, likely, keep being re-negotiated.

What people looked for when the streets were mostly empty during the late patrols, generally depended on their individual concerns. Patrollers looked out for littering, hidden drugs in flower beds, and items left in cars that might attract thieves. As a patroller, I also learned how the most common crimes are committed and through which access points houses might be broken into. Whether we walked in silence or were laughing, I always found something comforting in walking as a group and I was able to move in a way that I had not previously moved at this time of the day, feeling free and unassailable. Only after some time it became clear to me that being part of the neighbourhood watch had influenced my corporeal inhabitancy of this place quite strongly in a process of 'learning crime' and encountering it as a group.

During fieldwork, I often found myself looking at houses and comparing their levels of safety. 'They should not leave their bin out there', I would say to myself, thinking of a comment Richard had made the other day about them being used as supporting tool in break-ins. I found my body readying itself for a patrol - for watching out for 'bad guys' – even when I was walking the local streets by myself. Essentially, my body was cultivating a distinct form of suspicion. While ideas of who the 'bad guys' of the neighbourhood are and what precisely renders a behaviour 'suspicious' or inappropriate may vary within the suburb (as I will outline later on), considering ourselves patrollers of the neighbourhood and holding ourselves as such

appeared to impact on our collective being in a space with our suspicions and manner of walking being influenced by the ones around us.

Another patrolling experience stressed the importance of feeling connected as a group for me. I was meant to meet Richard at his office at 4.30am on Saturday, the 16th of January 2016. When my alarm rang this early Saturday morning, I jumped out of bed to get ready. The reason he likes to go on patrol this time of the night is that, apparently, a lot of crime happens just about then. I walked down the dark and empty streets nervously, turning around with every ‘strange’ noise I heard. Not being used to (and frequently being advised not to) walk alone at night and after a recent spate of robberies in the suburb, I was alert and ready to run if necessary. I clutched my phone and my keys in the pockets of my black parker, the only things I brought along. Standing in front of Richard’s office, I realised that the lights were still off inside and I waited outside the white little Victorian house, shifting my position every now and then to change my perspective on what was happening around me, all the while looking out for Richard. About 50 metres away from me and close to the Lower Main Road, two men and a woman seemed to be sleeping off their drunkenness. One of the men kept opening his eyes and looked at me, presumably because I did the same thing or because he was curious about what I might be waiting for. After 20 minutes and failed attempts to contact Richard, I decided to walk back home. I walked fast, imagining that, if I were on ‘patrol’ with another person, I would be walking in a slow and comfortable manner – even if on the lookout for ‘suspicious characters’.

Mauss (1936) considers the manner in which people walk or eat to be bodily techniques, as a craft to be learnt, which becomes adapted depending on different situations. He understands bodily actions as the embodiment of a particular cultural context with intersecting factors such as gender and class impacting on varying practices. Bourdieu (1990) developed this idea further into the theory of the *habitus*, binding people

into groups. In Obz, the vulnerability to crime and the state of precarity it manifests in can be seen as also translating onto habits and distinctly developed bodily skills. The ways in which vulnerabilities become embodied are very revealing when it comes to the making of self, identity and belonging (Van Wolputte, 2004). Being a patroller requires the making and inventing of a particular cultural space and self within it, revealed through the cultivation of certain ideas and embodied practices and strategies to ensure safety. Christina mentioned once that there are some members who prefer walking alone, which, she added, she considers to be pointless. ‘How would they know what to look for, if they haven’t learnt from somebody else?’ she asked rhetorically, looking at me intensely over the red frame of her glasses that tended to slide down her thin nose. Learning to patrol as a bodily technique in engaging with precarity and insecurity becomes adapted in multiple ways. Throughout my observations, I found the cultivation and embodiment of suspicion to be both, part of a shared group habitus and individually negotiated, depending on fears and ongoing experiences in the making of an identity that finds a comforting notion in belonging within the ONW.

Thus far, I have shown that understandings of what is perceived as suspicious can impact the body and that individual interpretations can be difficult to separate neatly from the dynamics and views of the neighbourhood watch group. The following section looks at shared understandings of what constitutes a ‘suspect’. It also shows that motivations and foci in searching for ‘suspects’ vary.

5.3. Who are we looking for?

John, the ‘father’ of the ONW, intended (but had not gotten around) to organising a ‘learning patrol’ during which people interested in patrolling are trained in what to look out for. However, all my informants explained that the indicators of what and whom they consider ‘suspicious’ are somewhat hard to

pinpoint and triggered by intuition. While there are certain behaviour patterns that are searched for (for example, walking slowly and in a hunched manner, trashing, peeking over walls, looking nervous, trying to remain unseen) there is something that is described as a quality that only someone who is familiar with the local context can detect. Where physical descriptions of 'the suspect' are concerned, no one volunteered with a detailed one. However, the ONW and police patrols that I observed, as well as circulated pictures of 'suspects' in the online groups made it very clear that 'suspicious behaviour' uncannily overlaps with bodies that signify poverty – thin, sometimes missing teeth, with ragged clothes wrapping what is coded as a 'Charly' or 'Bravo' body³⁴ (also see Seekings, 1996 and Jensen, 2006 on territorialized and racialised young, male bodies in Cape Town). The practice of categorising and reporting 'suspicious' people (often with the consequence of them being encountered as such by patrollers, private security personal or the SAPS) and the circulation of images of 'suspects' creates a collective memory or archive (see Appadurai, 2003). The constant confrontation with reports of 'dodgy behaviour' and images of 'suspects' leads to a continuous cultivation of suspicion. When reported in the WhatsApp chat group or via the two-way-radio, 'suspects' become 'checked out' by either Brett, other police officers he sends to the scene, Richard or the private security staff he supervises. Some patrollers confront 'suspects' themselves and ask them what they are 'up to'. In one instance, a 'suspicious Bravo man' was reported to roam the streets by a member in the WhatsApp group. Others tuned in, saying that he had been seen peering into houses by them as well. It was decided the man was 'up to something'. This was when local news editor Andre clarified that he had hired the young man from Mozambique to distribute his newspaper to all the houses in Obz. As if that was not enough to determine the man's innocent intentions in the

³⁴ Substitute for the still prevailing racial category 'Coloured' in South Africa, indicating a cultural and racial 'mix' and in-between-ness.

manner of occupying the local streets, Andre continued to vouch for the man's sober habits to offer the group some relief. Individual and exchanged ideas of what is out of the norm in a potentially threatening way shapes concrete bodily practices, strategies of being and encountering bodies within the suburb.

The different people I patrolled with during my fieldwork had different foci of attention when monitoring the neighbourhood. On one patrol (his and my first on the 30.06.2015), Ethan (Christina's partner) spent most of his time looking for drugs in flower beds, cracks of houses and drains after Luke made a comment that these constitute hiding spots for dealers. Others, like Ethan's wife Christina, found it more important to establish their physical presence (wearing bibs and carrying two-way radios) and walking unified in what I would describe as a constantly held, medium pace, the casual manner of which reminded me slightly of scenes in Western movies in which the sheriff arrives and whose calm steps and mere presence interrupts a situation of conflict. While Ethan was patiently checking an alleyway for hidden drugs, Christina had already marched ahead to the front of the group with her head high up and a stern look on her face. At times where personal conversation was minimal, some patrollers would start looking into cars for items that may invite the smashing of windows. What follows then is the often fruitless search for the owner of the vehicle in order to express a warning and perhaps give a brief lecture on safety. There are yet other patrollers, who do not only report 'suspicious' individuals with a brief description in the main WhatsApp chat group for Brett and Richard to respond to but who insist on approaching individuals and asking them what they are doing and why. The different foci of attention, ways of patrolling and conceptualising what is potentially dangerous or suspect can be seen as being tied to particular personalities, understandings of self and individual comfort zones.

While there are shared and differing concerns of who is a 'suspect' and how potential threats to the community should be encountered, the defining lines are not always clear. In Obz and

through attempts of individuals to talk on behalf of those living much more precariously, those lines are particularly blurry, as the following section outlines.

5.4. Shades of being ‘suspicious’

Lock (1993) stated that the body is imbued with social meaning. The body is also historically situated and becomes not only a signifier of belonging and order, but also an active forum for the expression of dissent and loss. Thus, it ascribes individual agency. In looking at strategies of safety in Obz, I found the bodies of ONW members and the ONW itself as a social body to be ‘forums of expressions’ through which memories of the past and everyday experiences are interpreted and negotiated in engagement with notions of a ‘suspect’. Embedded in the search for the phantom suspect and in negotiating space in the suburb lies a wish to belong in a context of order.

Christina saw drug deals as a threat to individuals and the community as a whole because she had experienced the damage it can cause. In the descriptions of her encounters with drug dealers she was fearless, would take the upper hand and controls the situation. She physically interrupted drug deals and confronted dealers bravely. The ‘suspects’ she identified and the kind of suspicion she cultivated can be seen as form of resisting and managing a feeling of precariousness that has to do with her own demons. The restlessness issues triggered with her and the fierceness with which she would discuss them in the chat groups (for instance people building temporary shelters and occupying the abandoned gas station and old, graffitied fabric building) would sometimes trigger bemusement but also spirited discussions.

Understandings of what is suspect were frequently challenged in the chat groups and monthly meetings with opinions clashing quite radically, ranging from calls to cleanse the suburb by all means to people discursively challenging the

very privilege of what it means to have a home in the suburb. On patrol, lines of belonging were not always easy to draw. Eugene for instance, was known to most permanent residents by name and was described in the latest edition of *Obslife* (December 2015) as an elderly, mentally-ill Obz resident who lived on the streets without known relatives. I read several WhatsApp messages complaining about the man's behaviour. The newspaper described him as a 'fixture in Observatory, where he was well known for his often inappropriate attire, the mess he left on local stoeps³⁵ and occasional fits of rage which were characterised by impressive cursing. He never hurt anyone' (*Obslife*, December 2015). This description (having encountered Eugene on many occasions, I found it quite fitting) was placed next to a print of a drawing of him by a local artist as displayed in the local gallery. Eugene had a physical breakdown a few weeks prior leading to the article with the headline 'has anyone seen Eugene?' to be published. The ONW WhatsApp community and other local forums of communication were abuzz with expressions of concern.

Eugene, even if he did not 'fit' into societal structures, he was a widely tolerated and even accepted member of the community. His behaviour was rationalised by explaining it through a medical diagnosis, schizophrenia. Something renders Eugene different to other homeless people who would be chased out of the area and sometimes beaten up. The 63-year old with light skin and a long white beard, bushy eyebrows and creased face, giving him a very characteristic expression, was considered a 'fixture', not an 'intruder'. He had become a 'fixture' because someone at some stage explained the etiology of his behaviour, which he was struggling to express and thus rendered it tolerable, even if this overall tolerance was accompanied by occasional complaints. Communal voicelessness and the precarious lives some people in Obz live are thus

³⁵ A commonly used Afrikaans word referring to a veranda in front of the house, used by South African speakers of different mother tongues.

not fixed stages but can shift in either direction. Richard knows what it means to live in the streets. Meeting up with Christina, she told me that she did not have access to her husband's bank account and her funds were exhausted. She used the last of her cash to stay at a backpacker for a week until a new opportunity arose. 'I have a friend who will let me sleep on her couch. It's just a bit complicated so I'd rather not...' The social rules that determine whether a life is recognised as such, as worth sheltering and protecting, depend on the context and on one's networks. In Obz, which is thought of as a niche for unusual characters, people would often show themselves forgiving when rules are bent a bit further. To Richard, this meant that his job is being rendered more difficult by those he dismissingly called 'liberals'. To Eugene, this meant that there was a space that he could be in without being forced out into a likely more precarious life.

Thus far, I have focused on the cultivation of suspicion in general and its impact on bodies and being in the suburb. The following ethnographic example illustrates that patrolling and 'being suspicious' is not something that is learnt simply by reproducing a set of practices. In its immediate corporeal experience, responses to people are tied to individual notions of who and what constitutes a threat and become subject to individual negotiation. It also illustrates patrolling to constitute a strategy in engaging with vulnerabilities.

5.5. On patrol with Christina

Christina and I arranged to meet one night. After our last patrol together with Richard during which they both kept cutting each other's stories short, Christina suggested that we meet alone so that we could talk. We met at the local 'horse box'³⁶, a

³⁶ The presence of the horse box and the guard are meant to keep the crime in the immediate area low, which is why its position is changed regularly to distribute the effect. Similarly to the topic of visibility through bibs and the carrying of two-way radios, the strategizing behind the box was

box on wheels in which a security guard is positioned. We started walking and chatting and I let her take the lead in choosing directions on both levels. Following her without having to think about where to go or what to discuss comforted me.

We drifted in and out of conversations about relationships and loneliness and she described how painful it is for her that Ethan, her husband, is at sea for months at a time. She asked me if I was seeing someone and I told her about a complicated romance that had started a couple of months back. She talked about her ex-husband and how he took pleasure in emotionally abusing her and keeping her self-esteem low, like her mother had done all her life. With Ethan, she explained, it was the first time in her life that she felt good about herself. He made her feel good about her curves and curls, which she has spent more than 40 years hiding, rather wishing for her sister's genetic composition. Her ex-husband had cheated on her with her friend, who she had also always seen as a better version of herself. She was active and skinny, like she herself was at some point as well, she explained. When Christina found out about the affair, her ex-husband somehow managed to make her feel like it was her fault. I was absorbed in the story and hardly noticed where I was walking. Only on occasion, my gaze shifted from her face to our surroundings, making sure I was not running into anything or crossing the street without checking for cars. I felt my muscles getting tense and relaxing with the ebb flow of this extract of her life story with her personal drama becoming part of my body.

We walked all the way down to the railway lines and entered a badly lit, empty road. All of a sudden, Christina stopped and looked at a car in front of us, commenting that it looked 'dodgy'. The lights of the car were on with the engine running calmly. One of the headlights was not working. 'Reporting a dodgy car in Florence Avenue. People are just sitting in the car, possibly

questioned in the Security Council meeting, arguing that visible strategies give criminals the opportunity to plan committing crimes a few streets further.

waiting for a drug deal to happen', Christina announced into her two-way radio. The response was a short, scratchy sounding recognition of the report from the local security, without the promise of coming and checking out the situation. When we walked towards the car, it suddenly started moving. After approximately ten metres, it stopped again. My heart was pounding and I looked at Christina in search for advice. Instead of having a strategy ready, as I had hoped after all her stories, she met my enquiring gaze with a helpless look on her face. Eventually the car started moving again and disappeared around the corner. Just as we began to converse again, we heard a car behind us again and turned around. It was the same dark station wagon with the broken headlight. Christina and I exchanged a quick look and, without saying a word, started walking very fast without actually running. Before we turned around the corner, she asked: 'Is it following us?' I replied 'no'. After checking a few more times as subtly as possible, we slowed our pace. Christina informed Brett via WhatsApp as we walked back up Station Road. By the time we reached Obz's night life and busier streets, the excitement seemed almost forgotten to me, leaving only a soft, almost unnoticeable tingling in my body. Even though the experience was intense and challenging, it also made me think about how the action of patrolling can bind bodies through the process of walking, sharing and caring.

Looking at descriptions and images in the chat groups, there seems to be a rough, shared idea of what constitutes 'suspicious', serving as common denominator and social glue of the ONW. What is more, a phantom suspect justifies practices of social fingerprinting in the neighbourhood and the exclusion of people from the area, often without evidence for any legal misconduct. However, individual concerns and past experiences meant that what patrollers recognise as 'dodgy' will vary. I would most likely have simply walked past the car Christina considered to be suspicious and continued with our conversation, figuring that the people in the car are picking someone up from the house. I would have interpreted the running engine and lights to be a

positive sign as it means the group of people (we could not see exactly how many there were and what they looked like) are not trying to noiselessly hide in the dark. Christina's immediate thought was that there must be a drug deal in progress, with her experiences and ideas of drug dealers as a particular kind of criminal leading the way for her bodily reaction to this encounter. I experienced the situation as surreal but was quickly swept up in Christina's response to a moment that she classified as dangerous and suspicious. On our way back, she apologised for bringing me into a hazardous situation and suggested that, next time, we should bring a man along to patrol with. Christina *knew* what 'suspicious' behaviour looks like, at least in the context of Obz; there was no hesitation for her with regard to something 'dodgy'. She also had an idea of what a patroller has to do, even though her embodied knowledge and response to a situation was surprisingly improvised. However, her big wind jacket, her quick decisions of what routes to take, the confident way she held herself and worked her two-way radio communicated to me that Christina knew herself in the role of the patroller well enough control and stir the situation to some extent. When Christina felt uncertain in her role as a patroller and we found ourselves in the position of being the ones who are potentially assailed, it became clear that no protocol or strategy solves the issue of feeling vulnerable to a particular kind of crime. Control goes hand-in-hand with the potential loss of it. Patrolling the neighbourhood, individually and as a group, may generate a feeling of comfort, increased security and belonging but also carries the risk of being confronted with one's fears, triggering episodes of experienced insecurity along the way. During the experience, Christina's way of gaining control of her insecurities by occupying the space as a patroller of the ONW was disturbed and so was her strategy for an encounter involving distinct categories of villains vs. patrollers. Christina's and my experience shows that it is important to look at practices of patrolling as a process and as subjected to shifts and turns as much as a person's lived history.

5.6. Conflicting translations of trust and suspicion onto bodies and selves

According to Baier (1986:234), ‘Criminals have been the experts at discerning different forms of trust’. In Obz, counter-strategies to vulnerability to crime and precariousness rely on the idea of a morally corrupt ‘suspect’ and practices of excluding anyone who resembles the phantom criminal. Precarity is experienced on an immediate level through particular encounters and through a deeply socially embedded distrust in state institutions. At the same time, suspicion becomes cultivated and embodied practice, with new reliance within the suburb being established and nourished through frequent communication through different channels. What is more, suspicion may be cultivated through the organisation, individually embodied and translated into practices of patrolling, but can cause conflicting reactions.

Christina, for instance, tends to get herself into dangerous situations. Her interference with the drug trade makes her worry that the dealers will one day come ‘after her’. One form of protection patrollers have is contact with the police, which is known to arrive on crime scenes either late or never. The other and potentially quicker possibility is to communicate through the WhatsApp group and ask other patrollers for backup. There is a handful of patrollers who will try and come in more speedily. The lack of protection does not keep Christina from entering dangerous situations routinely. In the first conversation we had during my first patrol (on the 30.06.2015), she told me about a situation in which she was attacked by a man in an alley in the City Centre. The man put a knife to her throat and told her to hand over her phone. She started screaming and swearing at him furiously. The realisation of how dangerous the situation was and what her reaction could have turned into only came to her much later, she said, adding her concern about reacting similarly again and getting herself ‘killed over nothing’ one day. ‘I don’t

know', she exclaimed with a concerned laugh, 'I don't seem to be able to control myself sometimes!'. Christina would get involved in situations in which she positioned herself as a moral safeguard, especially with regard to drugs and appearances she associates with them. At the same time, she said, she just wants to enjoy her new attempt to life with Ethan, and expressed determination to take better care of herself. 'I have to remind myself sometimes how much losing me would hurt him', she almost voicelessly commented over a coffee at one of the local backpackers, in which she was staying temporarily.

The impacts of trust and suspicion on corporealities may become visible through risky behaviour as in Christina's case, but also in many other ways. Brett for instance, has to embody different roles at the same time. As a police officer and sector commander of the neighbourhood, he has to act tough and decisively. His identity is tied to his uniform with his Facebook pictures and WhatsApp profile images rarely failing to portray him without it. What is more, his gun is usually visible and he never fully smiles. In some pictures, he is staging an arrest and covers the faces of the arrested with blown up images of lollipops or cartoon aliens. At the same time, Brett often emphasises his 'soft side' showing great interest in pleasing the community and protecting abused animals. This became clear not only through his WhatsApp responses to civil concerns and his Facebook posts but also through his quick response to neglected or dumped animals mentioned in one of the groups. A woman had left kittens at different intersections and Brett expressed great anger in the forum and updated the community that a case had been opened and that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) had been involved. He explained, during another conversation, that his job makes him happy as that he cares about the community and highlighted that he does not mind showing this. A number of his frequently changing WhatsApp profile pictures show him with his police partner Adam. I suspect that Brett has found a niche both in Obz and with his partner to cultivate the persona of a tough but

caring police officer he tends to show towards me and the community.

There are different ways of being a patroller in Obz. I felt myself getting sucked into a variety of emotions, reactions and dynamics throughout patrols, depending on my company and their responses to particular situations. Some patrollers, such as Paul (previously introduced as the ‘gun nut’) prefer to patrol alone but feed concise information back to the rest of the group (a short description of the person and situation, followed by the location, usually written in incomplete sentences and using shortened words). Some people patrol in order to establish relationships, like Amber, or to stylise a certain side or image of themselves, like Richard. Some ‘couch-patrollers’ share many of their everyday concerns in the chat groups and are sometimes therefore asked to ‘keep information relevant’, usually by chair and administrative person Luke. Another part of the group dynamic constitutes the reporting-back of how ‘suspicious’ bodies were handled on behalf of Brett and Richard. When Brett announces arrests in the group chat thread, expressions of support and encouragement are offered, often with icons and emojis such as fireworks and thumbs-up offering extra emphasis. Individual practices of patrolling the neighbourhood differ from one another but the constant sharing of perceived vulnerability and images of ‘suspects’ become part of the social fabric and a shared, public memory (see Appadurai, 2003), manifesting through notions of the ‘phantom-suspect’ and corporeal encounters in the neighbourhood. The cultivation of a shared notion of a ‘suspect’ (even though what exactly is being picked up as ‘suspicious’ behaviour varies amongst the patrollers) encourages the production of a self that carries the power of successfully defeating it. It also encourages the reproduction of a social space in which spatial segregations along economic and racial lines *de facto* prevail, whilst the same are continuously ideologically challenged and discussed by members of the community.

5.7. Conclusion

Looking for ‘suspects’ as per agenda of any Neighbourhood Watch group requires a shared understanding of the cultural space and a shared notion of what constitutes a threat to it. Patrolling within the geographic borders of the quaint little suburb presupposes the idea of a threat to people inhabiting the place. This threat may then be spotted, identified and removed. In South African contexts, the cultivated ‘suspect’ likely contributes to the maintaining and reproducing of spatial divisions, intersecting with racial categories and categories of social class and wealth. The ways in which suspicion and conceptualisations of a ‘suspect’ manifest in embodied practice in Obz varies, depending on individual worries or social competences but they do foreground a common knowledge of who belongs in this social space and who does not. This knowledge becomes embodied as group dynamic. When Ethan was in the process of learning how to patrol the neighbourhood and was told that drugs are sometimes kept in flowerbeds, he started targeting flowerbeds for the remainder of the patrol. When it was put to me during a patrol that bins can be used as props in jumping walls and fencing, I started looking out for anything that may serve the same purpose - even when not on a patrol. And finally, whenever a ‘suspect’ is identified by the group and responded to, my body would mirror the response of others either by picking up the walking pace or even running away, as I did with Christina.

The argument I want to make based on my ethnographic descriptions my ethnographic descriptions is threefold. Firstly, who and what is considered ‘suspect’ is tied up in group dynamics, generating a notion of safety in patrolling together or exchanging information in the different ONW forums. This I showed using the experience of my first patrol in which my body became part of a movement around me that was inspired by suspicion – something that I had neither anticipated, nor felt in control of. While there is a shared notion of the abstracted

‘suspect’ that everyone is looking for, there are different individual foci of attention when scanning the neighbourhood for this phantom. Both, the shared component of suspicion and the one framed by individual past experiences impact on bodies and ways of moving through the space.

Secondly, there are grey zones of suspicion and space for debate when it comes to deciding whether a person fits the general understanding of ‘the suspect’. In Obz as a distinct cultural space, there is often at least one advocate to be found who takes it upon him- or herself to turn a tragic life story into an argument for community support, which may allow for a less precarious way of being. Eugene serves as an example of how acceptance and the interpretation of ‘inappropriate’ behaviour can lead to the creation niches within the suburb in which one can exist without ‘fitting in’ or always adhering to the social conduct.

Thirdly and lastly, I argue that in situations where individual patrollers are confronted with people classified by them as ‘suspects’, the quick decision-making required in the moment may interfere with neatly constructed ideas of the role of the patroller. Christina felt her past to be suddenly chasing her in the literal sense and in the form of a car that she thought was occupied by drug dealers who were after us. The way in which she usually holds herself as a patroller and embodies suspicion offers her a sense of agency and control. However, as the described experience shows, this sense of agency can also be rendered fragile during patrols with a sudden loss of control. She as an experienced patroller found herself at a loss of what to do and panicked. It was only after we both walked away and realised that we were not being followed that she calmed down and recomposed herself. As a way of confronting her past of addiction and involvements with dealers and users, the practice of looking for ‘suspects’ thus also bears the risk of triggering the opposite of security and agency – a notion of being even more defenceless and exposed.

Who and what is suspicious, and in what context is both, decided based on a shared notion of the ‘phantom suspect’ and individually interpreted. There are niches and grey zones that can make the difference between being hunted or sheltered in the suburb. However, these are more tied to idealised notions of space and may conflict with the very sense of precariousness that inspired to the combing of the local streets. The selves unfolding as members of the ONW may thus be multiple in order to accommodate for both. The scale of being tough and protective and being trusting are hard to walk without losing balance. Obz as a space that seems to allow for plural ways of being also offers room for manoeuvring this scale, even within the neighbourhood watch group.

In this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which individuals gain control over a sense of vulnerability to crime by cultivating particular notions of a ‘suspect’ that becomes, to some degree, subject to individual re-interpretation in relation to an interpretation of self as a patroller of the neighbourhood. The next chapter interrogates patrolling as practice and performance, through which roles of the self can be constructed in relating with other people and understandings of crime, assault as well as protection.

Dancing with the devil: patrolling as performance

Abstract

The previous chapter grappled with the ways in which 'the suspect' is conceptualised in Obx both individually and as a group. This chapter outlines the ONW as a space to reclaim agency through performance. In so doing, it looks at how 'the patroller' is understood and embodied in his or her encounter with the socially cultivated 'suspect'. I argue that performing constitutes an essential strategy in dealing with notions of vulnerability to crime. The embodiment of particular characters and routine practices offers the opportunity to feel more secure and manoeuvre through what are experienced to be social minefields with 'suspects' being up to no good. The embodied skills and habits described in the previous chapter are also tied to power relationships in the suburb, the technologies of which diffuse onto bodies and the ways in which the patrollers understand their place in the world and their notion of subjectivity.

6.1. Introduction

As shown in the previous chapter, being a patroller and the practices it incorporates are learnt, cultivated and embodied. The particular practices and mannerisms that become part of a bodily understanding of a life-world considered dangerous and threatening results from a process of inventing culture and a making of the self, finding their firm roots in engagements with the past and aspiring for agency in the presence. Patrols offer an example of strategic, intentional actions contingent upon constraining structures that deny people in the suburb (and beyond) a sense of safety and security. In the context of the ONW, these structures are symbolically attributed to 'suspect' bodies. The ways in which these are encountered and dealt with

and the continuous re-balancing of power relationships in the suburb are of essence in understanding the self as less vulnerable to crime and thus as less precarious by being part of a social network that aims to counteract crime. Clifford (1988) establishes that self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than essence. Put differently, relationships are acted out and made through performance. In yet other words: ‘all the world’s a stage’, which Goffman (1949) considers to be the case for all spheres of social interaction, filled with routinized acts. This means that, to some degree, interactions can be considered acts or performances. The ways of embodying and performing ‘the patroller’ and understandings ‘the suspect’ both from the distance and in direct engagement, in the form of talk and in action and as a building stone for different relationships within different social arenas, reveals much about the types of relationships that become possible between people in Obz. The potentiality for social interactions also depends on the kinds of power that some bodies can assert over others. The following ethnographic data illustrates how patrolling the neighbourhood becomes part of a performance with its actors being entangled in and manoeuvring their positionality through local webs of power. It renders it apparent how understandings of the ‘self’ become negotiated via the role of ‘the patroller’ in the suburb and suggests ways in which embodied characters can serve as ‘technologies of self’ (Foucault, 1978) in challenging the social order. This will become clear through the opportunities the framework of the ONW provides to re-conceptualise aspects of the self as well as through the differently exercised powers and agencies within the suburb.

6.2. ‘I’m no superman!’

Excerpt from field notes, 08.09.2015

Upon locking my bicycle and entering the Obsid building around 4pm on a windy afternoon and climbing up a narrow flight of stairs, I greeted the

receptionist in passing and aimed towards Richard, who was now standing up in preparation to greet me. Instead of giving me a hug as he usually does, he patted my shoulder and steered me towards the big conference table, half covered by piles of papers and various communication devices. Richard is always a little different with me at the office and seemed more tense today. He paced back and forth and his voice was professional.

After we sat down with our coffees that he had prepared, Richard told me about a case where he found an extremely drugged man sleeping in another person's car, finding it a convenient and secure place to rest. Richard reported proudly to have beaten the man up and produced a picture of a disoriented and scared looking young man. The captured expression of the man was so deeply disturbing and saddening to me that I found myself unable to swallow the sip of coffee I had just taken or to speak for quite a few seconds after forcing it down. I believe in response to my expression Richard exclaimed unhappily: 'I can't be everybody's superman!'.... 'At least my method works and I don't just talk about stuff!', he exclaimed. [End of field note extract].

Richard feels he is confronted with too many conflicting and, in his opinion, unrealistic expectations as manager of all security-related issues in the neighbourhood. He finds a certain militaristic and uncompromising character to be the most fitting to deal with the different local characters and structures he has to take into consideration in developing strategies against crime (he deals with people of the Obsid, supervises the private security personnel and is recipient of complaints from private citizens). When I enquired about his well-being after not having seen him for a couple of weeks he said 'My job is to be busy all the time. But don't worry about me— I'm a survivor!' Richard finds a direct confrontation through patrolling the neighbourhood to be strategically essential. During the patrols with him, he approached many 'suspects' and asked what they were up to and where they were staying. 'I want them to know my face and that I'm watching out for them!', he explained to me. His responsibility towards the community and the stress of having a temporary work contract at the time (it was eventually extended after a committee reviewed his work performance)

impacted on how he embodied the role of the patroller and were very much tied to his understandings of what it means to be a man carrying the responsibility to protect.

‘As long as I am in the neighbourhood, you don’t have to worry’, he once said to me. The ONW members embody their understanding of being a patroller differently – while Christina physically interfered with the drug trade, the young fathers usually stuck to a strict observing-and-reporting policy and often curbed Christina’s enthusiasm for following and catching ‘suspects’ in the criminal act. On one late Tuesday evening patrol and upon seeing a man carrying a big black garbage bag, Christina excitedly asked what the man could possibly be carrying and where to. The question was rhetorical but her desire to follow the man and find out for herself was tangible. Luke replied ‘It could be anything, I don’t find that suspicious.’ The rest of the group seemed in agreement and we continued walking along the otherwise empty street. John patrolled on occasion and in different constellations. For him, patrols were meant to keep the neighbourhood together and ensure that communication is working on all levels. When he invited me for a patrol on the 26th of October 2015 with a group of men I had not met yet, John made sure that conversations were in a constant flow. As the ‘father’ of the ONW, he is the orientation point and guide when it comes to improving communal relationships and interactions. Perhaps, because I spent many hours with him and because of his role as a security manager who encounters people in the suburb as well as ‘suspects’ in various contexts, I found the ways in which Richard embodied and performed the ‘patroller’ and communicated safety rather revealing. His and Christina’s strong focus on patrolling and their engagements with topics of homelessness and drug addiction show that suspicion and ideas of ‘the suspect’ can serve as a moral counter-figure to the self or rather of as less desired aspect of the self and are not necessarily the result of a clear-cut understandings of good versus evil. What is more, suspicion is not only cultivated and embodied but also becomes part of a performance. Here,

notions of ‘good patroller’ vary and change in the same way that notions of the ‘self’ change - in varying contexts and through different encounters. Notions of ‘the suspect’ as propagated through descriptions and pictures in the online groups become abstracted and, in actual encounters, they might also mirror the self in certain ways.

In patrolling as an effort to defend one’s social status and sense of control over the area as a group and thereby communicating suspicion, categorisations of the ‘suspect’ have to be unambiguous and do not allow for expressions of doubt. The performed ‘patroller’ thus has to be of a certain conviction and able to convey a readiness to make fast gut-decisions. Or as John phrased it: ‘You just know when someone is up to no good’. As habitus, these ways of seeing the world and potential threats become subtly and subconsciously internalised (see Bourdieu, 1990) and embodied. They also become challenged through re-conceptualisations of self via the role of a patroller of the neighbourhood. ‘The patroller’ is a cultural fabrication but is all but static and uniform in encountering ‘the suspect’, as the following ethnographic example illustrates.

6.3. Patrolling with Richard

Excerpt from field notes, 15.10.2015

[...] Richard and I were walking up Station Road, approaching Main Road. Along the way he explained, as he usually does when we reach this point, that there is a camera installed right in front of the church and that he wants it to be moved. ‘It is pointless’, he says, as the area is too dark for the footage to be examined. He started giving me a local ‘crime tour’ as he also frequently does, outlining a number of strategies of committing crime he is familiar with. He explains that the kind of crime in Obz differs from the suburb Kenilworth where he has previously worked as a security manager in that it is more opportunistic and informed by the circumstance that the rights of criminals are regarded to be on the same level as the rights of the victims or

even levelled higher, as the victim's rights becomes essentially neglected in acknowledging the humanity of the inhumane.

We kept returning to the topic of romantic relationships and he tells me about him often feeling lonely and thus being glad he has such a busy job. We were in the middle of such a conversation when Richard suddenly started to determinedly walk straight up to what the groups refer to as a 'bin scratcher' or 'bin miner' (someone who looks for food and other items in garbage bins). After his stories of beating up homeless people in the early morning hours so as to purposefully rob them of the deepest, most recovering part of their sleep, I expected a loud and perhaps physical confrontation. Instead, I heard a soft, gentle-sounding voice escaping his short but neat and stiff presence before returning to me, pulling up his high-sitting and too-short jeans at his belt. With a satisfied nod, Richard then clarified: 'He said he will clean after himself', in a manner suggesting this was the concluding comment on the topic and we commenced our walk, chatting about his daily routines. [End of field note excerpt].

This experience made it clear to me that understandings of the persona of the patroller vary and are in a constant flux depending on the situation one finds oneself in. Had Richard felt under pressure to perform as the security manager when we encountered the 'bin miner' during our walk and chat, he may have been more 'in character' and approached the man, hunched over a bin in the somewhat abandoned, dark street, in the very firm voice that I had previously heard him use when engaging with the unwanted of the community. Richard has referred to himself as a 'sheriff' before whose main task is to protect the area from what some people in the chat group call 'no-gooders'. Evaluations of what or who is 'suspect' tend to seem straightforward. Nevertheless, my own fixed notions of what I though was Richard's static concept of 'suspects' and dehumanising behaviour towards them became more nuanced through the encounter with the 'bin miner' and me seeing Richard's ability to relate to the man's desperation in a direct encounter. The experience led me to further question what makes 'suspicion' and how it is processed.

The ONW constitutes a sub-culture, invented in a locally specific way (see Turner on culture, 1985), encouraging an idea of a self that refuses to be diminished by crime. The persona of ‘the patroller’ is constructed in opposition to ‘the suspect’ and helps channelling a fear of crime that motivates more and more people to join the group (even though the participation of many of them only take a virtual form). Cultivating, embodying and performing the role of ‘the patroller’ as a group of people gives texture to the invention, imagination and fabrication of human realities in the suburb, accelerating a sense of being in control of the immediate environment.

At the same time, I found the different characters within the organization to be re-interpreting their role within the group and in the suburb overall, often somewhat reflecting the challenges and struggles that reoccur in their life stories. I remember the agitation with which Christina told me about a conversation with a young woman who spends most of her time in the local streets and is known to be associated with heroin and prostitution. When the young woman asked Christina why she feels the need to follow her around and make her life difficult by calling the police on her all the time, Christina replied ‘because I don’t want to see your miserable face!’ It took me a few seconds to process the sudden violence of her tone but by the time I had, Christina had, more calmly, elaborated further that she finds it painful to see lives wasting away because of drugs like hers had been just a few years earlier. Christina’s anxieties are centred on a particular type of crime and being exposed to it is not only a challenging reminder of her past but also a way of encouraging the part of herself that is done with a life directed by an addiction to drugs.

This section has sought to emphasise that being a patroller is a type of performance - one that has to be re-conceptualised along with notions of self within the ONW as a particular institutional framework. The following section outlines patrolling as a performance more concretely.

6.4. Playing cat-and-mouse

Patrolling and the different motivations for playing ‘cat and mouse’ often reveal the ambiguities of everyday performance in the suburb. The rules and broad guidelines of the task of ‘finding the suspect’ become topics of discussion in the different ONW forums - but are largely accepted and reproduced in action. Thus, cultivated and internalised notions of the ‘suspect’ and the embodied practices tied to this phantom being (such as patrolling and circulating a certain kind of crime-knowledge) can be argued to reproduce social structures to some extent. This also becomes clear through the interconnectedness of SAPS and the ONW, with the latter, to some degree, taking over the role of the state. The information and cell-phone-snapshots of ‘suspects’ that are circulated via WhatsApp, Facebook or email are accessed and responded to by Constable Brett on a daily basis, who then either decides to send a police vehicle – or to adhere to the situation himself if he is on duty. His responses in the group are usually quick and enthusiastic and his work is responded to with cheering and many encouraging symbols in the WhatsApp chat groups (such as hands clapping, thumbs up or fireworks).

Observing Constable Brett Nile on patrol on the 6th of November 2015 rendered it apparent to me just how routinised his part is in the social play of ‘dealing with suspects’ – the aftermath of the reporting done by the ONW members. I expected drama, sirens and much resistance. However, what I witnessed was sobering and different. The young and sturdily built Brett and his middle-aged and slender colleague Adam calmly addressed the suspects they had stopped in Afrikaans and asked if they could search them. The men who were stopped seemed rather familiar with the procedure and largely produced the contents of their backpacks without their facial expressions revealing any drastic emotional shifts. A couple of men, stopped in a small alleyway, underwent the procedure wordlessly. Upon

request, the content of the backpacks was produced and even the foil-wrapped food they carried was examined. Shoes and caps came off before they were inspected closely and carefully (as they are popular hiding places for drugs, Brett later explained to me). All pockets were checked just as exhaustively. The procedure was followed by a thorough tapping down of the bodies themselves. Without exchanging any unnecessary words, the men were left to continue walking.

The routine procedures and friendly greetings of local characters that would likely framed as ‘suspicious’ by ONW patrollers in the chat groups seemed like a well-known and often- rehearsed dance. In this part of the dance abstract ideas of the ‘suspect’ and particular bodies turn into tangible experience of individuals being physically confronted and engaged with by officers (representing the state). This renders apparent a routinised and embodied quality of policing the neighbourhood that I did not expect, even if taking into consideration that my own presence in the police car, squeezed between Brett and Adam, may have influenced what became observable to me to some extent. It was the notion of familiarity that made the whole process of singling out people based on their appearance and way of moving and the searching of them seem somewhat less violent to me. My first police patrol also left me with the impression that the practice of observing and reporting from a distance and through the virtual sphere opens up spaces in which the ‘suspect’ can remain abstract and a not persistently challenged entity, even in Obz. A direct confrontation with the ‘suspect’, however, requires a particular kind of embodiment of suspicion. As a performance, a way of being and negotiating spaces on the social stage (Goffman, 1949), the role of the police officer is just as much subject to mediation as that of any other patroller of the neighbourhood. Brett’s calmness and focus on routine strategies (like searching ‘suspects’) I found to stand in contrast with images on his Facebook page, showing him almost exclusively in uniform with his gun and posing with ‘suspects’ upon their arrest (at least that

is what the images suggest). The poses tease out the power imbalances between the portrayed characters. The arrested individuals, as mentioned before, are often shown handcuffed with their faces covered, law-abidingly rendering them difficult to identify but also stripping them of their humanness by degrading the exclusively dark-skinned young men to symbols of success in the fight against crime. Power in such images and in circulated images of ‘suspects’ in chat groups is portrayed in dichotomies – there are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forces. The lack of ambiguity here is not in line with the everyday policing practices I witnessed and in which relationships have to be more carefully worked out. For instance, some ‘suspects’ are simultaneously police informants, greeted with a fist-bump by police officers and joked around with. A young, nervous-looking young man that I had previously seen along the larger roads of the suburbs was stopped by Brett who asked him from the driver window if he could perform one of his magic tricks for me. After this short exchange of words, the young man, seemingly relieved, immediately started speedily moving the cards in his hands and instructing Brett to pick one with a suddenly more confident voice. The chosen card was re-produced to us after many rapid and skilled hand movements. I expressed my surprise and appreciation for the entertaining act.

In the cat-and-mouse game played in the neighbourhood between suspected opportunists, looking for quickly obtainable assets, and opportunists of the ONW, looking for criminal activity (ranging from illegal car-guarding to robberies and physical assault) - performances and routinised actions feed off each other and develop alongside one another. They form a symbiosis that, in face-to-face encounters, sometimes struck me as a surprisingly smooth social dance in which the rehearsed steps of the partner is mirrored. At the same time, it is not always clear who is the leading part. New strategies of security and surveillance initiatives often lead to the development of new skills to disable these strategies. As Richard stated with regard to the broken fence along the railway line, which had been reported

to serve as an escape route after robberies and other criminal activities (according to Obslife and discussion points brought up in meetings): ‘The hole must be closed, – even if they make another one tomorrow’. Due to the flexibility and creativity of people committing crimes, security strategies discussed at the Security Council meetings were agreed to thus require flexibility as well, with mobile cameras and unpredictable patterns on behalf of private security and SAPS forming a part of them. (It is also considered general knowledge in the suburb that predictable behaviour patterns render a person more prone to having one’s house or car broken into, as one may be observed by people looking for opportunities to gain access).

While dramatic encounters are appreciated and rewarded with attention by an audience of ‘couch-patrollers’ and fellow street patrollers as signs of success with plenty of praises, the few individuals who actually do encounter ‘suspects’ on a face-to-face level seem to follow familiar steps in performing their particular roles in patrolling rather than provoking an aggressive confrontation in which social power and notions of control may be compromised. Robberies in the street and in homes, the ready use of weapons as tools of intimidation, challenging certainties of the very physical existence of a person, are not in line with what suburban inhabitants aspire to. Yet, the imagined and desired ordinariness seems to require a spatial exclusion of particular kinds of bodies for others to be able to thrive while the air of violence prevails. The continuous challenge between the two ideals, both somehow working towards less precariousness in their lives, leaves the audience or seemingly less active performers insecure about their future.

This part of the chapter has elaborated on the aspect of playing cat-and-mouse in patrolling and the kinds of performances the social role-play involves. Chapter 2 has already illustrated that there are shared and individually negotiated notions of the ‘suspect’. In performing ‘the patroller’, roles and symbols of strength and superiority as well as simplified ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are encouraged, but become negotiated more

carefully in physical encounters. The following section addresses performing 'the patroller' as a *technology of self* (Foucault, 1988).

6.5. The performed patroller as technology of self

I interpret the embodiment of the culturally fabricated 'suspect' and 'patroller' to offer a space for agency and imagination. Such performed roles 'holdout the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world', to borrow Conquergood's words (1989:83). In a refashioned world, anxieties can be eased, at least temporarily. Part of the cultural performance of being a patroller of the suburb is what Foucault (1988) has coined as technologies of self, affecting the body-self, which then becomes re-interpreted in the process.

According to Foucault (1988), technologies of the self permit individuals to influence their own bodies, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, perfection or purity. Understanding one's role as a patroller and transforming oneself through that role can be considered a means to create a particular 'truth'. The ways in which Brett and Richard for instance embody their roles in the community illustrate this. Both hold positions in which they are expected to protect the suburb and the people within it. They are also equipped with certain powers – Richard's interpretations of crime form a part of the development of local security strategies (and therefore he is present in all local meetings that are concerned with these). Brett, as a police officer, holds the power to arrest and thus physically restrict people's freedom to move. Richard decided to undergo a training as a peace officer (and so did Peter, the 'gun nut'), which, upon completion, would allow him to write tickets and search people. Even so, where both Richard and Brett are concerned, the expectations they are confronted with seem out of proportion to the means they have accessible in strategising against criminal activity. Brett's uniform, gun and position as the manager of all police operations in the area indicate power – a

power that Richard and Peter would like to have access to in order to survey the area more effectively. The evening course, preparing them to be peace officers with certain social powers, offers a technology of self with which a particular kind of truth can be moulded through the occupation and performance of the role of a powerful patroller. One aspect to becoming a peace officer is being allowed to wear firearms without having to defend oneself in front of the part of the community that is strongly opposed to them as a means to control movement in the area. The powers Richard and others will be given are not only a reward for their continuous efforts to physically patrol and scan the neighbourhood (while the credit of making the neighbourhood safe is mostly attributed to Brett's efforts, whereas Richard's reports are met with much less enthusiasm in the chat groups), but also enables them to extend their role as patrollers.

As a local reference point with the state's responsibility to distribute safety and security, Brett finds himself in the position of having to regain the very trust that is lacking when it comes to the state and its role as protector. He does so rather successfully as it seems and the renewed relationships and communication between the police and locals (through ONW channels) were recently celebrated in the local news (Obslife, November 2015). Brett and his partner, Constable Adam, told me about the humiliations and physical strains they had to undergo in their training when becoming part of the SAPS. The withholding of food and social contact and being forced to stay in the same position without moving for hours were part of the disciplining of their bodies. Brett also explained that, at the police station, there are strong racial divisions with 'black' officers staying amongst themselves. With all this tension of negotiating his positionality as a white, Afrikaans speaking man, the local celebrations of his work encourage him in his ways of manoeuvring the matrix of expectations spun around his role as police strategist for the area. Brett tries to be a version of himself that he feels comfortable with and that is in line with both, the

meanings attached to being a police officer at the station, amongst his colleagues and acquaintances as well as in Obz as the area he is responsible for.

Foucault (1988) describes technologies of self to be emerging from a negotiation with the 'moral codes' around a person and their reaction to them. In the context of Obz, technologies of self, serve to transform and re-construct oneself within power relations that prevail in the suburb and lead to particular trends in institutional decision-making. They also build the social grounds upon which people interact. The persona of the 'patroller' is thus not only cultivated, embodied and performed as an organisational requirement, generating a notion of agency. The performed patroller also becomes, as argued in the previous section, negotiated in the process along various lines. What is more, negotiations of self through acquired skills and attitudes can be seen as techniques to renew or transform the self. In the discussions and social exchanges that take place within the suburb, in the ONW specifically and through attempts to find oneself shifting between coded practices and bodily negotiations of space, technologies of self emerge and transform the self in ways that create room for happiness or satisfaction in a state of precariousness and vulnerability.

This section has shown that patrolling and performing the 'patroller' demand the development of particular skills and attitudes. Those skills and constructions of realities or 'truths' may not be the same for everyone but they enable individuals to continue being on this 'social stage' (Goffman, 1949) on which one feels at risk. People in the suburb take it upon themselves to develop certain strategies in the hope of transforming the nature of the space they patrol and for the sake of finding a better way of being by grappling with local 'moral codes' and relationships of power.

6.6. Conclusion

Being a patroller of the suburb is part of a performance and serves as a technology of self. The social spaces the ONW provides offers an opportunity to invent a certain cultural sphere and self within it. Being a patroller and being able to have a concrete and constantly recorded and archived impact on one's surroundings (mostly via the chat groups) offers a feeling of security and eases notions of vulnerability to crime. Through its cultivation, embodiment and performance, the role of the patroller is meant to help fabricating, inventing, imagining and constructing a texture of human realities with increased notions of agency. The sense of relationality in the ONW absorbs the feeling of living precariously and in exposure to crime to some degree.

Being performers, members of the ONW are playing with the social order. As Conquergood (1998:83) stated 'As soon as a world has been made, lines drawn, categories defined, hierarchies erected, then the trickster, the archetypical performer, moves in to breach norms, violate taboos, turn everything upside down'. Impotence and powerlessness experienced due to crime (in combination with an awareness of the vulnerability of state institutions) becomes counter-balanced through the organisation with the idea that patrolling as a particular persona carries the potential to restore the social order. Different ways of processing cultivated and embodied suspicion thus leads to an actual and continuous deconstruction and reconstruction of the social space and ways of being in Obz. In the process, the roles of insiders and outsiders many in the suburb tend to challenge, become reproduced in efforts of maintaining the local status quo.

The 'patroller' is part of a role-play and thus cannot exist without its counterpart, the 'suspect', and a notion of precariousness that inspires the social script. The skills and attitudes that are tied to the role are mirrored in ideas of the

suspect, representing both individual and collective fears. For instance, being homeless was a period of Richard's life when he had to give up all control and could not even see his son. In the particular role Richard has created for himself as a patroller, he can actively challenge his fears and feel empowered. Brett, as well, challenges his insecurities and the pressures he is exposed to as a police officer by performing a particular idea of masculinity. For both of them, clear and unambiguous constructions of 'suspects' are, however, difficult to rigorously maintain in everyday contact and thus have to be reinterpreted along with understandings of their own roles and as patrollers of the neighbourhood. While they have developed skill sets that enable them to combat crime, also amongst others performance of a certain form of masculinity, they are forced to face the reality and humanity of suspects in direct encounters. In spite of Richard's violent stories, it is not always guns and muscles that speak a clear language but often rather a calm and often routinised way of negotiating space and roles within it.

‘Couch patrolling’ and the virtual embodiment of the Observatory Neighbourhood Watch

Abstract

The previous chapters sought to clarify what it is that people in the suburb are worried about, what they consider ‘suspicious’ and how they patrol the neighbourhood. This chapter engages with different virtual ways of patrolling via chat groups - something Christina has coined as ‘couch-patrolling’. The social media forums used as communication channels and the ways in which bodies are told and acted out through them will be central to this analysis. The stories folded into the ‘body told’ in the Facebook, Google and WhatsApp chat groups are indicative of a local social fabric that is a product of particular ways of understanding virtual bodies - and of relating them to physical bodies and vice versa. The central argument is that, in practices of cyber policing or ‘couch-patrolling’, the ‘suspect’ becomes a documented category and therefore a reality. The virtually modified ‘suspect’ is subject to what Postill (2008) has called suburban ‘internet localisation’, positing not a ‘local community’ impacted upon by global networks, but by differently positioned agents and agencies in an exclusive virtual sphere.

7.1. Introduction

The idea of the local neighbourhood watch is, in essence – as interviews and meetings have suggested – a social space within which community spirits ought to be lifted. Hollywood clichés of a suburbia where everybody knows their neighbour and can rely on their support may come close to what members of the ONW are attempting to facilitate. In Obz, neighbours coming together as a supportive extension of one’s body in a precarious situation cannot be taken for granted. The idea of this kind of relationality does, however, constitute an element of the agenda of the ONW. Collective physical presence and mutual support

are a rather obvious part of patrolling the streets of a particular area. In gathering people, the group does not only constitute the ears and eyes of the community (with the principle task of observing and reporting) but also conveys a statement to people who do not follow the law or the moral standards of individuals within the group. As a physically tangible human wall, patrollers make it clear that certain social realities will not be compromised and that their secured territory and confident composure shall not be penetrated.

In reality, it is a select few of the members who actually go out into the streets as a group of patrollers. Members are encouraged to use dog walks and trips to the local supermarket as an opportunity to keep their eyes and ears open for unusual and 'suspicious' activity. Such experiences often become part of an online log. Other reports in the Google and WhatsApp chat groups, as well as the posts on Facebook are sourced in observations, often conducted from the living rooms and kitchen windows of peoples' homes. In the monthly meetings of the ONW it became evident that showing physical presence is not considered an essential part of membership for most of the roughly 140 signed-up members. Perhaps, as was speculated in the meetings, this is due to the conservative, inclusive and 'non-fun' image of the organisation. Virtual chat groups and particularly the WhatsApp chat groups on a street level (not requiring an official membership) have grown abundantly in the first few months of their existence. Those chat forums function as an elaborate emergency whistle and as an outlet of one's worries and suggestions for communal improvement. The groups enable members to reach out for help without their affiliation with the group becoming common knowledge or something the members identify as. The extensive use of messaging services pose questions of who should get access to information and how this information may be filtered (both ongoing topics of discussion in the monthly ONW meetings).

I found a detailed engagement with the WhatsApp chat groups to be particularly important and central in my

ethnographic explorations of the ONW as they had a) mushroomed over period of research, due to a perceived drastic increase of crime in the area, and as they b) constituted a main source for communication and basis for ONW members to network. The impact of the chat groups on perceptions of safety and notions of ‘the suspect’ (located outside of the networks) are thus well worth being discussed in greater detail. The chat groups allow residents to find similar-minded others across the suburb to exchange information with, to cooperate and to socialise with. John describes them as little sub-cultural islands that have their own ways of looking at crime and sociality. While some of them are social groups and mainly serve the function of organising braais³⁷ for people living in the respective street – others have been decided by their members to exclusively focus on pressing crime issues and suspicions. The 35-50 small groups (an estimation by administrator John) are the ones accessible to non-members and also allow for what Postill (2008:419) calls ‘banal activism’, which is ‘the activism of seemingly mundane issues such as traffic congestion, waste disposal and petty crime’. The sector leaders decide what information is relevant for the main ONW group, which is accessible to members of the ONW only. Suburbs, Postill (2008) argues, are particularly well suited to the study of emerging forms of residential sociality in the form of ‘internet localisation’. Through a collective production of sociality, the social capital (Bourdieu, 2009) of the participants increases. I argue that this increase of social capital is tied to a continuous creation and re-creation of an ideologically situated phantom ‘Other’ – the ‘suspect’ – as potential intruder of a particularly constructed social sphere. ‘The suspect’ is a product of the imagination of the participating members of the ONW, laid onto physical bodies which can then be seen as carrying not only their own understandings of self, but also those selves imagined by the ONW members – with those imaginations being informed by experiences of the past, engagements with

³⁷ ‘Braai’ is the commonly used Afrikaans word for barbeque.

the present and aspirations for a safe and secure future.

Physical bodies patrolling the streets are the ideal measurement of the success of a neighbourhood watch group. Virtual communities are, on the other hand, not central to the idea of a watched and regulated area. However, the virtual corporeality evident in the groups through which discussions flow and people seem to feel free to exchange ideas and express their grievances (and sometimes joys), co-ground a cultural notion of being in the world, founded in a pluralisation of sociality and place (see Nast & Pile, 2005). In other words, the groups constitute a cultural space in which different social hats can be worn and/or serve as part of a cultural costume attributed to certain outsiders of the group. They also transform the spatial economy of bodies and impact the ways in which crime and threats are imagined and internalised. Reading suburban Obz through cyber media is helpful in gaining an understanding of how ‘suspicious’ bodies are conceptualised and met with in actual encounters. The reading and telling of the bodies of Simone and ‘Crutches’ (see below) in the groups are telling in terms of how crime is understood, internalised and communicated in Obz.

7.2. Simone, the troublemaker

Often, it is specific individuals whose habits are known and who are referred to by their first name or nicknames that are subject of a more detailed discussion in online chats. Simone, for instance, is one of the most referred to ‘troublemakers’ of the area as she is known to have a heroin addiction, which she feeds by making money through transactional relationships and begging. Simone is often seen walking around in high heels over the pavement with a smile that owes its lively colours mostly to a thick layer of lipstick. At times, she would greet me in passing as though we knew each other well – sometimes I would receive an empty look in return to my greeting nod or smile. When Simone is being discussed, there usually is a brief response from

many sides that come across to me as a sigh of parents who are convinced they know better. Complaints are typically related to her shooting heroin in public areas or on people's porches and leaving needles behind. Another complaint was about her 'flashing her privates for everyone to see' (WhatsApp chat group, 30.12.15). Simone, amongst other particular locals, serves as a physical symbol and observable, embodied example of how criminal activity is generally explained by ONW members and the local media, namely with a cocktail of addiction and desperation, leading to criminal activities such as trading drugs and prostitution, attracting an unwanted clientele to the area. Simone's thin, pale and weathered body is thus seen as an invitation for further criminal activity, which is often explained through outsiders coming in who, in order to feed their drug habits, solicit money through begging, pick-pocketing and street/house robberies. Her body, associated with a form of rebellion and particular kinds of crime, thus essentially signifies social disorder and constitutes a reminder of what the ONW aims to tackle.

7.3. Faces and spaces of crime

Another local character is referred to as 'Crutches' or 'Pretty face', due to his occasional use of crutches when working as a car guard or begging and due to one of his many tattoos stating 'pretty face' across his throat, adding a challenging wisp to his toothless smile³⁸. 'Crutches' is associated with crime, as are all unofficial car guards and people who can be seen begging. When his nicknames 'Crutches' or 'Pretty Face' are mentioned in the group, the only additional information offered is the particular spot where he is at that moment. What this essentially means is clear: trouble. The solution: having him 'removed' by the police

³⁸ Front teeth are often removed deliberately by some South Africans classified as 'Coloureds' for status and being fashionable. Outside of this cultural space the lack of front teeth is more associated with poverty.

on the grounds of informal car-guarding or loitering. Certain faces and spaces can trigger an immediate association with crime in the chat group. Discussions about homelessness in the Google chat group (which appears to be more dedicated to social issues and reporting particular criminal activities that have occurred) are where opinions tend to clash. With regard to the forced removal of a group of people using the nearby Liesbeek River and its surrounding trees as shelter or a hangout spot, opinions ranged from a ‘they are all criminals’ sentiment to expressions of empathy and expressing the need to support social outcasts. In an online article, written by a local resident in response to the removal of the group of people staying by the river and claims that many handbags had been found with them (rendering the riverbed a hot-spot for thieves), offered the counter-narrative of a refugee containing a detailed account of his struggles and skilful ways to cope with them.

7.4. Signifying bodies

Simone, and Crutches offer examples of how descriptions of particular individuals circulated through the chat groups can affect the recipient’s understanding of particular crimes and their associations with particular types of personified bodies. However, more often than not, ‘suspicious’ characters are reduced to very short descriptions, including racial coding – usually through a substitute of the racial categories ‘coloured’ (‘charly’), ‘white’ (whiskey) and ‘black’ (‘bravo’). This is usually followed by a short description of the way in which the observed person is clothed, often as wearing hoodies and beanies and perhaps a noticeable colour. All this tends to be preceded or followed by a descriptive term regarding the person’s mannerisms, justifying the log in the WhatsApp chat group, which is reserved for ongoing and unsolved ‘suspicious’ activities. The person may simply be described as ‘suspicious’, as ‘loitering’ or as ‘being up to monkey business’. Sometimes, there is a description of the person’s behaviour involved, for instance

looking into cars (possibly in search of items to steal), walking slowly or aimlessly or being loud and offensive. Responses may come from Brett, Richard or other patrollers. There may also be further information shared by other group members, for example about a similar experience with the same person or a general call for caution.

Nast and Pile (2005:9), state that “the body is woven into many layers of signification, through the projection of images onto seemingly blank surfaces, onto the unwritten surfaces of the skin, through the writing of meanings onto bodies and places by intersecting fields of discourse”. The ‘suspect’ written and digitally logged, is of a certain kind and constitutes a projection of peoples’ anxieties. In some instances, ‘suspicious’ bodies are written in very descriptive and suggestive terms, presupposing a shared notion of what ‘a criminal’ is and a common moral economy of suspicion. At the same time, offensive racial terms (such as ‘skollie’, a term for a stereotypical, poor ‘coloured’ person) that are morally linked to the reincarnations of ‘the suspect’ (see Jensen, 2006) are avoided as they are likely to become intellectualised and challenged by some members of the ONW.

First and foremost, the digital groups can be seen as serving as forums in which perceived precarity is formulated, for street patrollers who physically approach or subtly observe and circle their projected vision of a criminal ‘suspect’ as well as for those who collect and add to the log of information from their relatively secure fortresses. At the same time, the group constitutes a space in which precarity becomes distributed. A particular ‘suspect’ may be actually hunted down and treated as a criminal or even get arrested as a direct result of shared information. Descriptions of a criminal figure (particularly common is the description of a ‘charly’ male with a beanie bag and hoodie, for instance) has an effect on how people who fall into this category are approached. Thus, agencies, actions and norms become altered through the virtual public sphere within the cyber groups, especially via the short and description-based

communication in the WhatsApp chat groups with their interlinked-ness with SAPS and private security leading to concrete actions. The other groups and meetings offer spaces in which the process of social fingerprinting becomes a critical discussion topic, with some radically disagreeing and others pleading their cases rather patiently.

If physical bodies link us to a place, what becomes of the role of the body through virtual spaces, used alternatively to actual physical patrols or as communication media during patrols by the ones combing the streets? Nast and Pile (2005) find that a “software” (such as a virtual chat room) is a disembodiment euphemism that removes our imaginaries from the material (hardware). Computers are thus screening devices that displace, filter out, and disallow for “real” places and bodies whilst ideologically replacing them with virtual ones. In the process, notions of bodies are filtered through memories and space. Using this as an outset, the following section will engage with the question of what kind of impact modern technologies have on common understandings of bodies and how the latter become filtered, categorised, and cared for.

7.5. Forums of ideological discrepancies

Analysing data from the different ONW chat forums, it becomes clear that one might be able to look at the organisation as a family like Richard does (see Chapter 2), but not as a homogenous group sharing the same views and epistemologies. I have emphasised the liveliness of discussions within the organisation throughout this ethnography as I found it to be descriptive of the character of the ONW. I would like to use one particular discussion of the Google group, a space in which many members see themselves invited to debate freely, to illustrate this. The discussion evolved around the release of an Obslife edition (February 2012) and the announcement of Allan to introduce ‘legal’ car guards to the area as an initiative to socially uplift individuals. There were nine responses within a

couple of days.

The first response reads as follows:

Dear Allan

It is always - with interest - that I read the centre spread of ObsLife which is the OBSID page.

I have a few questions about the “official” car guards who are to be employed:

- * what will be their main purpose?*
- * where will they be stationed?*
- * what hours will they work?*
- * how will one identify them as “official”? - (just a bib is useless, it can be handed over to anyone)*
- * will they have IDs with photographs?*
- * are they going to stand in the road and try to wave people into parking bays whilst standing in the said bay?*

I don't want to appear 100% negative but I do have concerns about this project. I further appreciate what you are all trying to do for the disadvantaged.

I should appreciate some clarification. Kind regards

Rosemary

Another response reads:

Well done to OBSID for taking the initiative to introduce some accountability at the car park. I think it's a great idea that OBSID will be improving on the existing system of random people.

I'm confident a certain amount of training and controls will be in place and we will all have a better parking experience.

Thanks Allan for the initiative. Barbara

This was followed by the comment:

Having just read the relevant sentence or two I am a little bit concerned at this car guarding gig. Firstly it's not a useful contribution to anyone. OBSID will simply be paying layabouts to accost people for money which I have no doubt they will continue to do. I have no problem with the street sweeping initiative or maybe some gardening or something useful.

Car guards that get paid is just a handout for nothing in return and I cannot agree with that and think it's a rotten idea.

What next - pay the drug dealers not to sell their drugs to the public - at least a drug dealer is performing a useful service to the portions of community that uses them and in Obx that's a large portion I would imagine if you just consider cannabis.

Slippery slope Jon

Further responses spoke for the positive impacts of car-guarding and challenged the very meanings of the terms 'car guards' and 'homelessness'. The discussion then rested. I chose this example as it illustrates how chat groups offer an alternative space for members of the ONW who resist the act of physically patrolling. The benefits of forming a part of this social body anyway, lies in its capacity for people to connect in other ways and offer each other support.

7.6. Couch patrolling as distant caring

The circumstance that very few patrollers actually spend their time in the streets might be due to different factors: a plain lack of motivation, anxiety to willingly expose oneself to potential criminals, not identifying as an active part of the organisation or for other reasons. I argue that, while any of those factors might apply to particular individuals, the luring attribute of cyber patrols is that they seem to enable one to care both

distantly and selectively.

There is no lack of shared information and images in the Google, WhatsApp and Facebook groups, but the exchanges differ from face-to-face conversations in that one can choose when and how to access and process other peoples' experiences. Butler (2016) argues that what is happening very close to a person may disable one to bear taking responsibility for it. She is referring to cases of unwilling adjacency as the result of forced emigration or the redrawing of the boundaries of a nation-state. Concerning information shared in said cyber groups, I found it likely that it is the topic of crime that is too close to home to constantly care or take physical action. The precarity of it therefore becomes abstracted through cyber communication. In the filtering and selecting of experiences and descriptions of criminals within via cyber space (turning them into ideas rather than imminent threats), memory is shaped. The subject headline of a Google chat group message might prompt a refusal of engagement and skipping that particular email or deleting it, rendering easier to detach oneself from the topic. A precondition of 'caring distantly' in this fashion and selectively developing feelings of solidarity across space and time towards people considered to be similarly vulnerable is that the information triggering this solidarity must remain 'relevant' to the majority of group members. Chairperson of the ONW, Luke, reminded attendants of the monthly meeting that it is not beneficial to be swamped with too much information or 'chitchat' and that communication channels are ought to be kept free for 'relevant' information to be paid due attention to. He therefore decided to split the main sector groups into two groups each—one for 'pressing' information that should be acted upon quickly by the police officers and private security, and one in which more general and less pressing thoughts and worries can be expressed. This categorisation of information also makes it easier for members to select what kind of input they want to consume and when. ONW members can thus choose the degree to which they want to relate to other peoples' happenstances and

how much they are willing to care about them. At the same time, the different street groups are constantly in a process of negotiating what kind of information should be shared, how and when. What is too much information, what is worth knowing? What is the best way of using the medium in order to distribute a notion of safety and community instead of paranoia?

During my fieldwork, most people I conversed with about levels of crime had at least one crime story to tell and were seldom reluctant to do so. As crime stories are something many people have in common, they create a feeling of ‘sitting in the same boat’. As the majority of members choose to use particular media to cope with a perceived likelihood of becoming a victim to crime instead of attending physical patrols, I found it ethically questionable to take advantage of my access to their email and phone numbers (being a member of the ONW myself) to interrogate their behaviour and decided to respect the practice of taking physical distance from the organisation – a very interesting finding within itself. However, the fact that many ‘cyber-only’ members find the vulnerability to crime to be a topic of relevance and are not just a name on the ONW register is evidenced in their online shares and contributions – and thus in their distant caring.

Members who attend physical street patrols often seek comfort through direct social contact. Knowing and seeing your actual neighbours, having a conversation while patrolling the streets are strategies to create a sense of security and safety. In cyber-patrolling on the other hand, it seems to be the temporal and spatial dispersion and sense of remoteness or detachment that offer a level of comfort. What stands in the way of an emotional detachment, however, is the posting of pictures of the ‘criminally suspicious’ in the chat groups. As Butler (2016) states, images can trigger an involuntary sense of proximity and ethical responsibility regarding certain topic. War pictures, for instance, can be strategically used to serve certain political agendas and embed subject matters into an emotionally padded discourse: These images are beyond our will, not of our making, coming to

us from the outside, as an imposition and as an ethical demand (Butler, 2016). The discourse on criminal activity within the groups is, as I have pointed out, at times specked with images of suspected persons. Occasionally, I find myself thinking ‘ah that guy!’ when one of the pictures loads on my phone, recalling a random encounter with the individual somewhere in the suburb. Even when the image is not familiar, having visual confirmation of the person being in a particular place at a certain time can harshly interfere with the potential of using the groups selectively and with emotional distance. This holds also true for the notification tone of the WhatsApp messages. I only learned about the technological possibility of silencing the group chat notifications for either a day, a week or a year three months into the fieldwork. I was quite relieved to activate this feature as I found the frequency of the noise to be intrusive and to make me feel tense. I interpret the chat groups to be spaces in which an emotional engagement with the topic of crime can be individually moderated and selected to some degree. At the same time, the images imposed though them become embedded subject matters as described by Butler (2016) and are problematic in that they follow a black-and-white, victim-perpetrator scheme. The next section looks at the ways in which cyberspaces such as the various ONW chat groups distribute precarity.

7.7. Precarious and comforting qualities of couch-patrolling

As people, none of us is beyond the dependency on a supportive social space that recognises us as ‘fully human’ (Biehl, 2007) and thus as grievable (Butler, 2009). A denial of social exchanges that nurtures humanness equals ‘public deaths’ (Biehl, 2007) or ‘unrecognised lives’ (Butler, 2016) and legitimates frameworks that expel individuals and groups of people into ‘zones of social abandonment’ (Biehl, 2007). The ONW chat groups constitute a micro cultural space, presenting a particular

reality in which ‘the suspect’ is continuously portrayed in similar ways. I argue that the image resulting from this routine practice of logging suspicious information, established to ease anxieties about crime and generate feelings of safety and solidarity amongst members of the neighbourhood watch, becomes internalised and translated onto embodied practice - distributing precarity for ‘suspects’ in turn.

Socialising was a motivator for Amber in joining the ONW and patrolling in groups. Knowing some of her neighbours would make her feel safer, she reasoned, especially as a single woman. Amber had experienced a couple of house break-ins. With one of them, she had to try to hold her door closed while a group of men attempted to push their way into her home. For her, the ONW emphasised her humanness as a recognised part of a supportive social network. If something were to happen to her, there would be people nearby who might help, care or grieve for her.

Falling away from the social body that renders a person ‘grievable’ and ‘fully human’ means that one’s entire life story may be easily forgotten. Richard and Christina found their difficult family relationships worrisome and admitted to often feeling lonely. Patrolling physically and virtually is a way of keeping bad thoughts away and regaining control. They are also a way of feeling connected to others. It is the very purpose of the ONW group to resist an ‘air of violence’ by gathering strength as a group and through each other’s support. Much like in the tale the ‘three little pigs’ in which the evil wolf attempts to destroy the safekeeping shelter of the little pigs with a big huff and puff, the efforts of the ONW to maintain protective layers around them were sometimes more and sometimes less successful. However, it seems as though the mere association with the group conveyed an affirmation of one’s right to live safely, leading to a regulation of movements within the area. Being part of this social group is a sign of recognition and thus carries within itself a notion of safety. As with any social group, being an accepted part of the neighbourhood watch comes with

its challenges and the need to 'fit in'. The few physical patrollers tended to be choosy in picking whom to walk with and I sometimes heard patrollers making comments such as 'he is nice to patrol with' or 'no, he talks too much'. Cyber groups decrease this social pressure in their potential to recode oneself (Shields, 1996 with regards to cyber spaces generally). The ONW chat groups may thus ease notions of precarity without the societal pressures that come with group memberships that require face-to-face encounters.

Chat groups create boundaries between 'the real and the virtual, between time zones and between spaces, near and far. Above all, they create boundaries between bodies and technologies, between our sense of self and our sense of changing roles: the personae we may play or the 'hats we wear' in different situations are altered' (Shields, 1996:7). Perceptions of proximity, notions of time and one's role within it change. The ONW chat groups thus offer an opportunity to adopt a role that one may be otherwise denied or reluctant to embody and thus serve as spaces for alternative agencies. Local restaurant owner Jon, for instance, used the ONW Google chat group as a platform to address a number of social issues and often took a very passionate stance. His restaurant was located near the Liesbeek River and Jon was part of a group of locals who would occasionally take it upon themselves to clean the river and its green surroundings from the garbage brought there by wind and weather or by people. As mentioned, the riverbed is said to be a hideout for thieves in the area – a reoccurring argument by some that was substantiated when a large number of handbags were reported to have been found there once. I would frequently see Jon at one of the local pubs, usually surrounded by the same group of people. Yet, the large man with generous curls reaching his shoulders and a full beard came across as quite introverted to me. In spite of his vocalness in the chat groups, I never saw him attend one of the ONW meetings. Richard commented that Jon in particular would make his job difficult by consistently opposing his position and added 'he is not even staying in

Observatory anymore'. Jon was often engaged in various issues picked up in the Google chat groups, from issues regarding pets, human rights to surveying the prices and quality of private security companies. For Jon, the ONW chats seemed to be channels through which he could comfortably express his distinguished opinions without having a direct confrontation.

The ONW chat groups also produced a sense of collectivism and discussions that can lead to democratically generated infrastructural strategies without people having to attend monthly public forums. Being part of a larger group, individuals are linked across space and time. Groups constitute public spheres in which people of similar economic, political and material conditions are connected with individuating technologies eliminating the ability to speak laterally, to trust others or to occupy public spaces with others who are different (see Shields, 1996). Collectivism and shared markers bear a notion of agency. Common desires are set in motion and new opportunities for expression appear to arise. However, commonalities and a sense of collectivism in this contexts exists in juxtaposition to 'the other' or 'the suspect' who symbolically manifests through individual bodies but who is imagined as an overarching agentive. In spite of 'the others' being perceived as great security threats, the individuals whose pictures are posted look nothing like embodiments of social muscle power, but rather resemble weakened, fragile and often weathered-looking bodies, signifying social neglect.

Icons, as Shields (1996) explained, can be seen as bodily references, expressing bodily emotions and appealing to desires of group members. Even though patrollers understand their duties to observe and report (with police and private security forces often translating the information into further action), there is a subversion of an apparent lack of agency and dependence on government institutions taking place through the group communication. The constant contact with Constable Brett who would emphasise his responsibility for the area on a daily basis through the WhatsApp chat group (he also is

Facebook-friends with many of the ONW members) and being able to log and archive particular incidents, offers the organisation more space to manoeuvre and establish different kinds of dialogues. If a matter is not adhered to by the police or the Obsid, disapproval is expressed while ‘good work’ is rewarded with many symbolic ‘thumbs up’ and praises. The ONW as a whole also serves as a controlling body in that failure to react in an emergency on behalf of the SAPS and the Obsid are shared, further discussed and critically analysed in the monthly meetings as well as during patrols. The different modes of expression and reaction to socio-political happenstances produce a sense of influence and reduces a feeling of being a powerless victim to circumstances beyond one’s capacities and overwhelmedness by an air of violence.

Virtual spaces may sometimes render the summarising and digesting of crime stories easier. Since material is deemed relevant enough to be posted, it has merit. Knowing that the content of the group is regulated (some messages are taken out or message threads are discontinued in the Google chat group) makes the remaining and permanent content of the groups appear relevant to its members (although people sometimes disagree as to what constitutes ‘appropriate’ content). Despite the abstraction of stories and bodies within the groups, corporeal experiences are still important reference points in the forums. Actual experiences are translated and abstracted into a virtually told story – just to then stretch the ‘lifeworld and spill out of the computer world to refigure the conventions and routines of daily life’ (Shields, 1996:6). Cyber stories on crime thus do not merely remain stories inspired by corporeal experiences, but, in turn, impact daily routines and encounters. As described in Chapter 4, during my first patrol, one man was recognised by all patrollers as one described in the WhatsApp group chat on the same day. The group took the description and Hanne’s suspicion that it was indeed the same person (identified in dark of the late evening hours) as reasonable motivators to identify the young man as being linked to a crime, motivating us

to follow him for a while and make him uncomfortable with our suspicious presence.

When walking with Richard, he tended to remind me of particular issues discussed in the groups, which he follows, files and responds to religiously as the local security manager. He translates the blogs to what he sees and thus transforms what I, at times (depending on my mood), read as interesting or overwhelming information (including the grey-zone in between) into statistics and physical interference. Through his proud reports of having chased homeless people out of the area or Brett's reports of having arrested someone formerly declared 'suspicious' by ONW members, I became aware of the very real repercussions that the practice of couch-patrolling and the framing of potential perpetrators in the chat forums can have. People categorised as 'suspicious', based on their physical appearance and mannerisms, may spend the night in jail without proof of illegal conduct. It appears that the only way in which the ONW considers itself able to resist a precarious air of violence is a vigorous push into the opposite direction in which bodies born into precarious circumstances keep being confined to particular social spaces, leading to a manifestation of historical inequality and precariousness, traceable along territorial and racial lines.

7.8. Conclusion

What is mapped out through the media of communication and the bodies within it constitutes a moral economy of suspicion that manifests in one's sense of being in a space. In the ONW chat groups, body/space transgressions, the blurred boundaries between inside and outside as well as between different bodies does not lead to an equalising of bodies. Instead, binaries of difference become reinforced. As a result, the groups can be seen as spaces in which perceived precarity can be coped with – and as spaces in which the precariousness of the poor becomes perpetuated. The questions grappled with specifically

in this chapter are concerned with the particular ways in which patrols take place online and with the kinds of impacts that 'couch-patrolling' may have on the corporeality of the members who use them. What kind of information is distributed, filtered or consumed is moulded onto bodies. I conclude that agencies, actions and norms become altered through the virtual public sphere through the cyber groups, leading to a multi-layered configuration of the suburban social space.

The bodies virtually produced in WhatsApp chat groups and other forums can themselves be seen as sites of struggle (see Rich, 1984), with their geopolitics being produced through unequal power relations. The chat groups analysed in this chapter are exclusive to people inhabiting a particular social space who have an interest in maintaining the social boundaries established within it that keep people conceptualised as 'other' fenced off. Through the channelling of bodies that fall out of the 'norm', normative bodies (for instance the embodied patroller) are produced in opposition to 'suspicious' ones. The virtually created 'suspect' often forms the basis upon which patroller and police act. He also contributes to and facilitates anxieties linked to certain locations and images, becoming part of a collectively embodied memory. Virtually created realities are supportive of a desire of suburban class reproduction, but also become challenged and contested in the different social forums. Yet, the produced and widely circulated 'suspect' and desires to distribute security by rendering the space exclusive only to certain kinds of bodies form a quintessential part of the ONW mentality and its strategy to combat crime and reduce precarity for formal residents of Obz. The social networks tying the group together, for many and to a degree, ease notions of being vulnerable in that alternative modes are offered through which to engage with anxieties of becoming a victim to crime - through a notion of being a collective without the pressure of necessarily getting physically involved. At the same time that the group emphasises social belonging as well as the worth and influence of its members, it increases levels of precariousness for people

categorised as ‘suspect’ in a process of social fingerprinting. Agencies therefore shift to different degrees, depending on the role one’s body occupies in Obz. The option to physically remove oneself from the strategic street patrols as well as the vast sharing of information and images via the ONW communication technologies render the categorising of bodies impactful and, perhaps, easy to emotionally distance oneself from. Understandings of the ‘suspect’ moulded into concrete images, shape the ways in which differently gestated bodies encounter one another, also through the ONW links with state and private security staff, who carry the power to arrest and physically strip bodies of their humanness in order to increase the humanness of others.

Conclusions: Masking vulnerability and other comforts of being a patroller

Abstract

Relationships of trust and distrust in Obx hold more than meets the eye. The trust in state institutions to protect that John Locke (1967) once described as essential for the sharing of a social space is corrupted in South Africa, as is evidenced by an enormous private economy of security and volunteer-based organisations of social protection such as the ONW. The responsibility to protect from - and penalise those who commit crime is seen as ultimately lying within the hands of civilians. When private and supposedly 'high class' protection services were judged to have failed in Obx, private networks of security and trust were revived and renewed on different levels. The ONW as an organisation resulted from this in an effort to decrease perceived precarity in the suburb through strategic practices like patrolling the neighbourhood and discussing the foundations of the organisation in meetings. The implementation of strategies, as noted by de Certeau (1984), presumes control, is self-segregating and means setting oneself up as a barricaded insider. Thus, the ONW is a space in which agency and confidence become fostered whilst fears become cultivated. As cultivated strategy and as an embodied and performed practice, patrolling the neighbourhood in Obx imprints itself onto interpersonal encounters. Therefore, patrolling as social practice is a guiding element with regard to which relationships become possible and the degrees of humanness that become attributed to differently conceptualised bodies. Increased agency and confidence serve to dominate fears of crime and legitimate practices of dominating others – namely everyone considered 'suspect'. This ethnography is a testament to the individual challenges and inner conflicts involved in negotiating power in the suburb.

Anthropologist Paul Farmer found that it is the idea that some lives matter less is to be the root of everything that is wrong with the world³⁹. Years after the official end of the Apartheid system,

³⁹ <http://onlineforlife.org/graphics/the-idea-that-some-lives-matter->

the scaling of humanities is still common practice - one that may not always be done consciously with an intent to increase one's own human capital. While the attribution of levels of humanness is not specific to South Africa, due to having been part of the strategic maintenance of the status quo of a light-skinned minority as documented in recent history, it constitutes a particularly troublesome part of the local social fabric. Ideas of what type of person belongs in which kind of social space is prevalent and can be observed even in a suburb like Obz, which is considered to be very liberal. These ideas become specifically evident when looking at practices of scanning areas for people who are considered criminally suspicious. Spatial exclusion essentially means the prioritising of the right to safety of suburban inhabitants to the idea of open and shared public spaces. It means that access to the suburbs as urban spaces for opportunities in which different strategies of survival can be practiced due to a better economic flow can be an open path to some, but are denied access to for others. In Obz, globetrotters, students and international interns come and go in steady flows and boost the local economy. While Obz is a liminal space for some, leading to personal growth and stages in life promising new opportunities, for most of the people of local households I found it to rather constitute a space that requires strategising in order to render existences in the suburb more stable and safe as opposed to desiring transformation.

At the time of writing the concluding thoughts to this ethnography, especially in late December 2015 and January 2016, criminal incidents in the neighbourhood had increased and dominated the chat forums in the form of discussions. A spate of house break-ins, speculated in the chat groups to be due to the holiday season and a heat wave, led to anxieties being expressed and ONW members asking for early-morning street patrols to take place that only a handful of people (namely Luke, Richard, Christina and Amber) volunteered to take part in. On

the 15th of February 2015 and after a strategic house break-in just before dawn during which the passports and all the keys of the inhabitants who were sleeping at the time were collected by the intruders (in addition to other valuable items, such as laptops and cell phones). Consequently, Obz was reported to be ‘under siege’ in the group. The incident seemed distinct in that it strayed from the commonly shared opportunistic and drug-related explanations to crime. A few days later, John, ‘father of the ONW’ and risk manager by profession, conducted a survey across a few streets, concluding that 60% of the households did not have an alarm system. Responses to this quickly established statistic suggested that this may be the reason why the area is so affected by crime, suggesting that not being prepared and equipped for criminal acts equals an invitation to forcefully enter peoples’ houses. In light of the tensions at the time, I want to briefly mention two more events in order to, once again, emphasise the complexities that are embedded within perceived threats and the comforts of supposed security.

When my friend and housemate was robbed off her handbag (containing our house keys amongst other things) right in front of our doorstep on the last day of the year 2015, I found myself making use of the contacts I had made during my fieldwork. It felt good to have Brett’s number ready on WhatsApp and having him replying and reassuring me within seconds. The police arrived more promptly than I would have expected but no case could be opened without my friend being present, who had gone to change the locks at the place she was housesitting nearby. I closed the door behind the officers feeling stressed, dissatisfied and debating whether or not to share the information of the robbery in the ONW WhatsApp group. After all, this is what the group was for. I had been avoiding making any comments in the chat groups thus far so as to not influence the directions of the dialogues. However, this seemed an appropriate time to take part in the process of reporting and sharing as, I told myself, it may help others to be aware of the incident - a thought that I now find debatable. At the time, I did not see myself contributing to

an acute worry about crime in the area, but was part of something that helped processing this perceived, immediate threat merely by getting the information out and without expecting any reactions to the message (they are not always acknowledged with responses). Upon further reflection, I found that the only purpose the sharing of the information about the crime would serve is my own comfort by reassuring myself that I am part of a group that shares a common interest - the safety of people recognised as inhabitants of the suburb. This experience confirmed my findings and conclusions regarding the ease the ONW as a social group offers – even though this relief is accompanied by de facto spatial exclusion and the perpetuation of fears of crime.

Another incident warned me not to simplify the mechanisms and relationships of trust and distrust involved in creating a sense of relief from an air of crime in Obz. A resident reported in the Google chat group his own arrest by the police after having filmed them beating up and violently pinning to the floor a ‘suspect’ during an arrest. The officers in question are not known to me personally. The resident, Ian Gilfillan, included a link to one of two articles he wrote about the experience of being ‘unlawfully arrested’. The incident, described in great detail in the article, made it clear that what is an accepted response to a perceived threat depends on what is known about the law by people in a particular situation in which representatives of the law become involved for one or another reason (it also reminded me of Richard’s complaint about vagrants knowing ‘too much’ about human rights). The reply by Chairperson Luke was carefully worded. He said that the facts of the case should be ‘properly investigated before we get too carried away’ and that it should not be concluded that all SAPS members act unlawfully. He also encouraged members to report similar experiences. The discourse unfolded based on Ian’s account of trauma and his direct experience of what it means to be suddenly considered a danger (in this case because he had documented the unlawful behaviour of police members). Reading about this reminded me

that relationships of trust and distrust cast wider nets for some than for others, coating some experiences with stickiness made, among other things, of eloquence, points of access and networks, rendering some experiences much more memorable than others. I find this to be an important realisation and hope that the rest of these concluding comments will be looked at in the ambiguous shades of light that any ethnographically investigated topic should be coloured in.

This book has focused on the individuals and institutions that strategise security, finding that the fear of crime and air of violence in the suburb Obz is related to particular ways of being suspicious and distrustful. The first question I posed at the beginning of this piece of writing was how suspicion becomes cultivated, embodied and performed in Obz. The data show that the ONW, as a collective, spreads suspicion in certain ways and directions. The people considered 'suspicious' usually fall within the racial categories 'Coloured' and 'Black'. Looking at the very bodies of people described as suspects by ONW members renders apparent a socio-economic continuation of the Apartheid system, manifesting in an ongoing spatial segregation of people and frequently resulting in a lack of bodily and social nourishment. At the same time, what is considered 'suspicious' is also subject to individual experience and a shared aspiration for a future in which fears of precariously falling apart from a collective group support and thus feeling more vulnerable and exposed to crime will be an obsolete and distant memory. How a particular 'phantom suspect' is imagined and how it may motivate people to patrol in the suburb thus depends on the individual but is also specific to the socio-cultural context. The collage in the appendix shows that the constructed bohemian and liberal image of the suburb and its acknowledged inhabitants and practices of intellectualising and eloquently dissecting topics regarding human rights does not manage to break with inherited practices of spatial segregation, which haven't been structurally grappled with enough to lead to a significant change. The bodies in the collage not only fit into particular colour schemes

associated with the racial categories 'Coloured' and 'Black' but also seem to show signs of sheer lack in terms of human care. As emphasised throughout this ethnography, the 'suspect' is often constructed in opposition to the 'patroller', who is himself a product of shared notions of what it means to be strong and able to defend one's social standing. In patrolling the streets and through the reclaiming of agency by rendering Obz a social space exclusive to the comparably affluent, patrollers of the neighbourhood put on a certain kind of social skin (see Turner, 2012) in performing the 'patroller'.

The continuous cultivation and circulation of a specific cosmology of both 'suspect' and 'patroller' impact on understandings of public spaces and their being potential platform for all kinds of social interactions. People in Obz navigate suspicion and precariousness by masking themselves and others through their roles, narrowing paths of exchange of sociality and care. While the ONW is an alternative source of trust to the state, and constitutes a social space that fosters agency by promoting relationality and an environment of mutual support for its members, it builds on pillars of deep distrust and suspicion when it comes to the social 'other' – even if these topics are continuously raised and debated in the forums of the ONW. The performed patroller is often mirrored by ideas of the 'suspect' and framed by particular notions of masculinity that female patrollers often adhere to during street patrols and in direct confrontation with 'suspects'.

Social trust and distrust in the suburb cannot be looked at in isolation. Factors of distrust are sought to be eliminated by the members of the ONW while other social ties are strengthened. Low (2001) understands attempts to isolate communities in this manner to be a response to middle-class and upper-middle-class individuals' desire for community and intimacy, consequently leading to strategies of facilitating, avoiding, separating, and monitoring. As Low (2001: 5) put it, 'They bring individual preferences, social forces, and the physical environment together in an architectural reality and cultural metaphor'. The

previous chapters have outlined the social intricacies of these architectural realities and cultural metaphors, impacting on social textures, ideas of humanness and abilities to relate to one another. I have shown how being ‘suspicious’ appears to form a barricade in human connections, with notions of ‘the patroller’ and ‘the suspect’ constituting ideological binaries, which serve as a pre-requisite in Obz in justifying practices of spatial exclusion in this particular social context. However, the differences made and manifested in fabricated social roles are individually challenged and are subject to reinterpretations. Ideas of defensible spaces are also clearly linked to particular ideas of masculinity. Furthermore, relationships in Obz are often cultivated in a virtual sphere and taking on an abstract language of idealised sociality. Simultaneous to the increased importance and wide-reaching impact of modern information and communication technologies in conceptualising crime and ‘suspects’ in Cape Townian suburbia, there is an expressed longing for a more ‘traditional’ face-to-face community in which neighbours know one another and can be counted on when facing a crisis.

According to Pain (2008), over our life courses, we all move in and out of shades of fear, influenced by our own experiences as well as by social, spatial and temporal situations (also referring to Valentine, 1989; Stanko, 1990a; Pain, 1997a). Yet, the constantly high levels of social distrust⁴⁰, exclusion and the ways in which suspicion becomes cultivated and embodied practice in suburbs of South Africa call for an academic focus on aspects of intersubjectivity. Our ability to relate to one another constitutes something tangible and bodily (Csordas, 1999). Embodied practices of safety and security reveal a great deal about our existence in relation to others and has thus been central in both, my collection of data (namely my own bodily experience of

⁴⁰ See Jean and John Comaroff (2006) who also noted that levels of fear of crime are not necessarily related to the frequency with which crime occurs or is claimed to occur in official statistics.

being in the field) and the observed and reported bodily experiences of my informants. As power relations in urban South Africa continue to encourage practices of social fingerprinting and ‘othering’ (in the name of safety and security), they interfere with aspects of human relatedness. However, even though structures and power relations become reproduced to some degree, they are also challenged in Obz through attempts to broaden discourses regarding the unequal distribution of opportunities.

Increasingly, the fear of crime is seen as inseparable not only from crime and disorder in cities, but also ‘from a range of other social and economic problems concerned with housing, employment, environmental planning and social exclusion relating to poverty, gender, race and so on’ (Pain, 2008:1). In this ethnography, I have argued that the fear of crime in Obz, characterised by an air of violence, is worth being looked at through the lens of everyday practices of social and spatial exclusion, which are likely to leave long-lasting marks on local social landscapes and understandings of what it means to be able to defend oneself from threats. Social fingerprinting and exclusion come with certain embodied practices and a reproducing of social class and space through habitual practices (see Bourdieu, 1990). The ways in which notions of the self are renegotiated in the process become very apparent when looking at the ‘new generation’ of neighbourhood watchers who tend to problematize and exhaustively discuss issues of social exclusion while habitually encouraging the same through their routines. The ‘suspect’ not only serves as the social glue, holding the ONW group together in an attempt to establish social order by implementing interpretations of state rules and moral standards, taking form in the imaginative persona of ‘the suspect’, against which the self can be reflected and understood in the role of ‘the patroller’.

According to Conquergood (1989), human realities are always fabricated, invented, imagined and constructed and cultures are made or even ‘made up’. Practices of watching the

neighbourhood and the cultivation of ‘suspicion’ described throughout this book reveal the ambiguities and enigmas of everyday role-plays and performances in the suburb. Cultural fabrications like the ‘suspect’ and ‘patroller’ holdout the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world. I have interpreted them as part of a software, used in response to notions of vulnerability and precariousness. In the interest of developing policies that may transform South Africa and all its unique spaces and cultural *mélange* these ‘softwares’ or embodied routines that relate to trust or distrust should be looked at more closely in different local contexts in order to get a better understanding of how the perceived underlying barriers (often coated in a rhetoric relying on cultural distinctions) may be challenged in a unifying manner instead of reproducing categorical concepts of what it means to be human in the different niches of this beautiful country.

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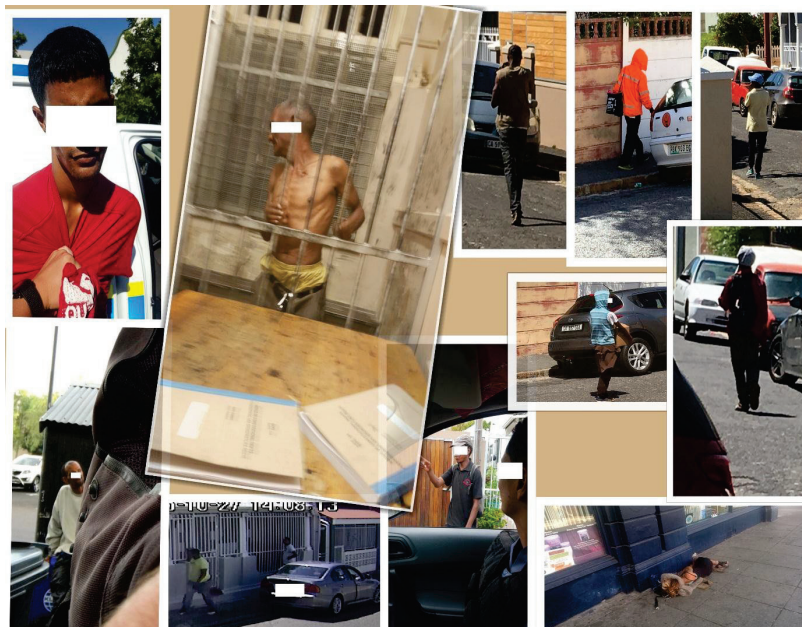
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Appendix

Figure 3



The unedited pictures are rather randomly chosen from the WhatsApp group snapshots of ‘suspicious’ people and situations. They were taken by different members on different occasions. Most of the time, they just served to keep members of the ONW alert to a particular circumstance. I used a crop-tool to render the faces of the men unrecognizable.

Top left: A young man being physically held and photographed by the police. Centre: A man turning away from the camera as he is being snapshot in a prison cell. Left bottom: An ONW member secretly documenting a man he finds suspicious.

Right next to it: The circulated shot caught from a private security camera of the neighbouring house of the one that is seemingly attempted to break into by the portrayed men.

Right next to it: A policeman talking to a man while his colleague takes

a snapshot of the man pointing down the street, who subsequently is added to the ONW WhatsApp chat thread as another ‘suspect’.

Right bottom: ‘Problem child’ Simone (see page 94 of this dissertation). Upper right: Different men at different times walking the streets of Observatory and being documented as ‘suspicious’ by different ONW members.

Figure 4: March 2015 edition of the local monthly newspaper Obslife, heading the Observatory railway line to be a spot and escape route for criminals. Location and neglect are thought of making it an attractive space for the unwanted of the suburb.



Got visitors coming to Obs?
Let them stay in the heart of the village

THE GREEN ELEPHANT

Our private rooms are quiet, comfortable and quintessentially Obs. Our dorms, housed separately, are ideal for student groups.

Phone 021 448 6350 57 Milton Road, Observatory

June 2015
Tel: 021 811 7654
Neighbourhood news, taken seriously
www.obslife.co.za
info@obslife.co.za

Rogue pub battle at fever pitch

IT IS too soon to claim victory, but recent developments around the tik and heroin infested club Ezithebani Braai Lounge in Lower Main Road provides hope that it is possible for community action to close down a problem bar.

Until the recent temporary closure of Ezithebani - it is still not a certainty - problem clubs in Obs have only ever closed down because of rental disputes with their landlords, and never because of action taken by law enforcement agencies against their flagrant disregard for their liquor licence conditions.

The clamp-down on Ezithebani is the first to have resulted from community pressure on the authorities to take action, even though the process has exposed just how ineffectual they still are in regulating the liquor trade.

It started last month when ObsLife exposed the fact that Ezithebani was trading without a valid liquor licence. The current owners, led by Don Khan, had bought the bar more than two years ago from its founder, Daniel Lossi, but had never bothered to apply for a transfer of the liquor licence onto their name, as required by law. Mr Lossi had agreed

with the new owners that they could continue trading for a while on his licence.

This became a permanent state of affairs. For the first two years, Mr Lossi renewed his licence without telling the Liquor Authority that he had sold the club, and by the time the licence came up for its third annual renewal Mr Khan and his co-owners renewed it themselves, but still in the name of Mr Lossi.

In order to ensure proper control of liquor sales, the Liquor Act states that the liquor licence holder or a formally appointed manager must at all times be present at the business when liquor is sold. The arrangement between Mr Lossi and Ezithebani over the use of his liquor licence was therefore illegal.



Ezithebani owner Don Khan (middle) faces down an attempt by the Police to close his rogue pub. Police backed down when he produced an "interdict" obtained from a magistrate against them.

It came to an abrupt end when ObsLife traced Mr Lossi to Sanlam, where he works, and asked him if he knew that his liquor licence facilitated a brazen drug trade on Lower Main Road and that the street-level drug pushers could be seen sauntering in and out of Ezithebani from about noon every day.

continued on page 12



WHY COOK?
Finest Ingredients - Delicious, Excellent Value

What's for Lunch?		What's for Dinner?	
Fried Hake, Chips & Buttered Roll - Combo	30.00	Beef Curry, Rice & Naan Bread - Combo	25.00
Chicken Curry & Naan Bread - Combo	20.00	Chicken & Butternut Bake - Portion	15.00
Grilled Rib Burger	25.00	Spaghetti Bolognese - Portion	20.00 each
Sausage & Mash - Combo	20.00 each	Spinach & Feta Quiche - Large	40.00
Chicka Chicken Combo 2 Wing Drumstick & Chips - Combo	25.00	Grilled Chops, Roast Potatoes & Vegetables - Combo	25.00

"Quality is our Priority"

Tel: 021 448 0409
Open till 9pm every day.

Figure 5: July 2015 edition of Obslife, discussing the decision within the ONW to discourage the carrying of firearms on patrol. The picture shows me with members of the Obsid public safety patrol strategy meeting.

Obslife

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info@obslife.co.za

Obs Watch says no to firearms

WITH a majority of 65%, Observatory Neighbourhood Watch (ONW) members voted against the carrying of firearms on ONW patrols. The vote was held after a number of members of the newly revived organisation asked if they could carry their licensed firearms on patrol for self-defence purposes.

"The law is not prescriptive in this case and we decided to take a democratic vote to resolve the matter," said Steve Killick, ONW deputy chair.

The vote was held by secret ballot at the most recent monthly meeting of the ONW. Emailed votes were also counted.

In the debate preceding the vote, those against the carrying of firearms argued that patrollers could possibly become targets for robbers looking for firearms, and that the possible presence of guns may cause criminals to react irrationally and become violent, putting all ONW patrollers at greater risk.

Police sector manager for Obs, Const Mark Berry, also argued against carrying firearms, saying that it can cause more problems than it could solve.

The vote itself was controversial. Some members felt that the mere raising of the question carried the risk of

Obs Improvement District (Obsid) COO Hudson McComb refers to a map of Obs during a discussion of the Obsid's public safety patrol strategy with residents, including (from left) Obs Civic Association chair Marc Turok, researcher Leah Junck, resident Gwen Dereymaeker and Obsid safety manager Hannes Bronkhorst. See p 7.



giving the ONW a gun-toting reputation.

Mr Killick said carrying firearms is against the neighbourhood watch's mandate, which is only to observe and report criminal activity. "It may jeopardise the integrity of our organisation if there was an accident or incident involving a sanctioned firearm on a patrol," he said.

Subsequent to the vote, Mr Killick told ObsLife that some ONW members intend to become official peace officers, which involves training. Such peace officers, who serve as volunteer City Law Enforcement reservists, may carry firearms on patrols, but they will have to be

clearly distinguished as peace officers.

At the meeting it was agreed that the ONW should focus on growing the number of patrols. The ONW, with more than 105 members, still does not have a formal patrol roster. Patrols are currently carried out on an ad hoc basis.

Mr Killick said they have about 15 members who patrol regularly.

"Our role is to report anything suspicious to the OPS or SAPS staff on duty and then stand back and observe. We then monitor the situation until they arrive on the scene."

Join neighbourhood watch, Obsid urges – page 7.

Hunters Cider 440ml
Dry or Gold
R64.99 per 6-pack



Harrier Whiskey
750ml
R86.99
each



Wellington VO
Brandy 750ml
R96.99
each



Sedgewicks Old
Brown Sherry
750ml
R25.99
each

Chateau Libertas
750ml
R34.99
each



Free deliveries in Obs Mondays to Friday at 9am and 3pm Tel: 021 448 0409

Hours of business Mon-Sat from 9am to 8pm (incl. Public Holidays). Sundays 11am - 6pm

Figure 6: June 2015 edition of Obslife, discussing the closure of 'rogue pubs' as a strategy to combat crime in the suburb.



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continued on page 12



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Chicken Curry & Naan Bread - Combo	20.00	Chicken & Butternut Bake - Portion	15.00
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Sausage & Mash - Combo	20.00 each	Spinach & Feta Quiche - Large	40.00
Chicka Chicken Combo 2 Wing Drumstick & Chips - Combo	25.00	Grilled Chops, Roast Potatoes & Vegetables - Combo	25.00

"Quality is our Priority"

Tel: 021 448 0409
Open till 9pm every day

Figure 7: November 2015 edition of Obslife rendering attempts to increase the cooperation between the ONW and the police the biggest news of the month

Obslife

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November 2015 Tel: 021 811 7654 Neighbourhood news, taken seriously www.obslife.co.za info@obslife.co.za

ONW, Police start collaborating

IN a breakthrough for the re-establishment of a functional neighbourhood watch in Observatory, the recently revived Obs Neighbourhood Watch (ONW) had its first joint patrol with the Woodstock Police recently.

On a recent evening, a group of about a dozen ONW members met the two constables on duty for the evening at the Observatory Improvement District (Obsid) security control room for a short discussion to coordinate their patrols.

It was a brief meeting, but it signalled the start of a shift away from the dysfunctional relationship between the various security projects in Obs.

Steve Killick, the chair of the ONW, said, firstly, the interaction provided an opportunity for the members of the community to meet Const Mlami Yoko and Melubakho Qhumayo, two of the team of police officers who have been patrolling Observatory for years but with very little social interaction with the community.

Secondly, the encounter provided a first exercise in coordinating patrols. The ONW members split into two



Steve Killick of the ONW (left) discusses patrol areas with Const Melubakho Qhumayo of the Woodstock Police.

groups, each patrolling a section of Observatory, while the police van patrolled the rest of the suburb during the two-hour long exercise.

The idea is that if such joint exercises could be held during times identified as regular high-crime periods, it could significantly dampen crime.

Thirdly, the officers were given an ONW radio to carry with them in their

patrol van, putting them in direct communication with the ONW and the patrollers of the Obsid.

The ONW and the Obsid recently merged their two radio networks. The remaining challenge was to get the police patrol van on duty to carry an ONW-Obsid handset.

The Observatory sector commander, **continued on page 3**

Castle Lite 440ml
Cans **R109.99**
per 12-pack

Carling Black Label
440ml cans
R109.99 per
12-pack

Savanna Cider
330ml Handies
R54.99
per 6-pack

Smirnoff
1818 Vodka
750ml
R84.99
each

J.C. Le Roux
Sparkling
Wine 750ml
R48.99 each

Three Ships
Whisky 750ml
R115.99 each

Wellington VO
Brandy 750ml
R92.99 each

Olmeca Tequila
750 ml - **R 179.99**

4th Street Sweet
White, Rosé, or
Sweet Red
750ml
R28.99 each

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Figure 8: February 2016 edition of Obslife showing protesters against police brutality and the right to document police action on its frontpage



Got visitors coming to Obs?
Let them stay in the heart of the village

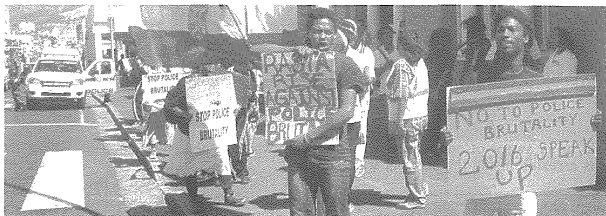
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February 2016 Tel: 021 811 7654 Neighbourhood news, taken seriously www.obslife.co.za info@obslife.co.za

NO TO POLICE BRUTALITY:
Members of the Rastafarian community protested in front of the Woodstock police station in solidarity with a local man who was allegedly assaulted by the police during an arrest. Local academic Eduard Grebe filmed the incident and was arrested and detained, only to have the charges against him withdrawn the next day.



Call for right to film police action

By Tamlynne Thompson

THE unlawful arrest of a local academic who tried to film the arrest of a suspect on a drug charge in Observatory has sparked calls to the South African Police to confirm once and for all that citizens may film police action.

Health researcher Eduard Grebe's description on the social-justice news website GroundUp of how he was unlawfully arrested caused a media storm and badly dented the reputation of the Woodstock Police.

Mr Grebe described how he saw two police officers arresting a man close to his home in Obs. Concerned about the

violence of the arrest, he filmed them. One of the officers, Const Mamli Yoko, ordered him to delete the footage and when he refused, arrested him. He describes how he was kept overnight in grim conditions at the Woodstock police station. Reasons given for his arrest included "riotous behaviour" and interference with the duties of a police officer.

The next morning he was taken to court where he witnessed a horrific assault by a police officer of one of his fellow captives in the back of a police vehicle. He was freed shortly thereafter. No charges were put to him. (www.

groundup.org.za/article/i-was-jailed-filming-police-assault).

Mr Grebe has since complained to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (Ipid) and the Western Cape Police Ombud.

The incident prompted the Woodstock-based Right2Know Campaign to issue an urgent plea to SAPS leadership to send a clear message to Police officers that the public may photograph and film them.

Right2Know quotes the Police's own Standing Order 156, which states that the police may not interfere with jour-

continued on page 10

Smirnoff
1818 Vodka
750ml
R86.99 each



Castle Lite 340ml nrb
R189.99 per case of 24



Wellington
VO Brandy 750ml
- R92.99 each





Gordon's Dry
Gin 750ml
R94.99 each



Hunters
Extreme Bold
Cans 440ml
R49.99 per pack of 4



J&B Whisky
750ml
- R129.99 each



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Figure 9: Flyer distributed to the households in Observatory at the beginning of 2015.

OBSERVATORY NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH
Membership Drive 2015
Why You SHOULD Join the ONW

- Get to know your neighbours - look out for each other
- Become the eyes and ears of the ONW, SAPS & OPS
- Build friendly relationships with Woodstock Police
- Patrol the Obs streets with us to take it back from crime
- Report direct via our 2way Radio network to SAPS, OPS, Premier Security, ADT and our Obs business securities
- Help create a safer, friendlier & informed community
- Form part of our street Whats App groups or form one
- We have Patrol Whats Apps for day & night patrols
- Street leaders can arrange braais, sport & fun events
- Offer financial support for radio expansions & maint.
- Volunteer your efforts of interest and help carry a load
- Feedback and progress conveyed via regular meetings

Membership is free – Renewed annually

ONW Contact Details

- ONW email: onw@obz.org.za
- ONW Facebook Page: <http://facebook.com/obswatch>
- ONW WEB: www.obswatch.org.za
- To post to group - email to: obsnw@googlegroups.com
- ONW Cellular: 082 081 0142

Affiliated Organisations

- OBSID: Observatory Improvement District
- OCA: Observatory Civic Association
- CPF: Observatory/Woodstock Community Police Forums
- OBF – Observatory Business Forum

Figure 10



PATROL PREFERENCES - February 2015

Dear Observatory Resident

The Observatory Neighbourhood Watch is committed in carrying out organised or impromptu patrols in the Observatory area. Patrols are mostly done in pairs, on foot, by utilisation of vehicles, scooters and bicycles or even set out occasionally with our pet dogs. We are the eyes and ears in our suburb regarding happenings of crime. Even leaving on errands from our home we consider it as a patrol and observe for any crime taking place - we retreat from it, and report the incident to the Police or local Security Provider/s, and then observe from a safe distance. While on patrols we notify the Woodstock Police Station and their vehicles by utilisation of our 2-way radios and or cellular phones. In this way SAPS keeps an eye or ear out for us as well. We also communicate via our 2-way radios with the OBSID Observatory Public Safety Security, Premier Security and occasionally with ADT. We also communicate information or patrol dates with fellow patrollers via our secure email address: onw-patrols@googlegroups.com.

Should you wish to join us on patrols kindly furnish us with your contact details and indicate your patrol preferences as per criteria below. You will then be placed on a Patrol Whats APP group and with your Sector Block Leader who will inform you of our current patrol roster and any other happenings. Our patroller's contact details and 2-way radio call sign list will be forwarded you for ease of slotting in with us and being on top of crime news or trends.

KINDLY INDICATE YOUR PATROL PREFERENCES:

Details Needed	Examples	Your Details
First Name:	----- Your Name -----	
Surname:	----- Your Surname -----	
Home Telephone:	----- Your Telephone No -----	
Cellular Number:	----- Your Cellular No -----	
Street Name & Number:	----- Your Address -----	
E-mail Address:	----- Your Email -----	
Patrol Type:	i.e: Car, Bicycle, Scooter, On Foot, Dogs	
Patrol Frequency:	i.e: Daily - Weekly - Bi-weekly	
Day of the Week:	i.e: Wed's, Sat's or Any Day etc	
Commencement Time:	i.e: 9 am, or 5 pm - Any Time etc	
Patrol Duration:	i.e: ½ hr - 1 hr - 2½ hrs or 3 hrs etc	
Transportation Available:	i.e.: Car - Scooter - Bicycle - Skateboard - Nil	
Comments or Suggestions:		

Your participation in the patrols, whether great or small, is sure to make a difference. Kindly fax your preferences to 021 448 2824, or send per e-mail to: alvescolette@gmail.com, or drop it off at 49 Scott Road, we will then soon make contact with you.

All for a Safer Suburb in Observatory

COLETTE ALVES
ONW PATROL COORDINATOR - 2015
Cellular: 084 208 1584

COLETTE ALVES
ONW PATROL COORDINATOR - 2015
Cellular: 084 208 1584

Figure 11



ONW Membership Form

Attach
45mm x 35mm
Passport size
colour photo

Name
I.D. No
Address
Telephone No
Cell phone No
Email Address

Area of Interest

☐ Patrols	☐ Communication Technologies	☐ Finance
☐ Administration	☐ Information Technologies	☐ Operations
☐ Recruiting	☐ CCTV Equipment	☐ Marketing
☐ Other:		
☐ Financial Assistance via Donations or Debit:		

Standard Bank Current Account: 075172925 - Mowbray Branch Code: 024909

Indemnity

I do hereby:

1. Acknowledge that I have read the Constitution and Code of Conduct of the Observatory Neighborhood Watch and fully understand the contents thereof.
2. Acknowledge that I have chosen to be a member of the Observatory Neighborhood Watch and voluntarily participate in the activities of the Observatory Neighborhood Watch.
3. Acknowledge further that the Observatory Neighborhood Watch is not a corporate entity established by or under any law, nor does it have a juristic personality.
4. Indemnify the aforesaid Observatory Neighborhood Watch, its committee and other members, in respect of any criminal or civil liability, against any cost, claims, suits or damages howsoever arising directly or indirectly from any intentional act or omission or any negligence on my part.

Signed at on this day of20.....

Full name and signature of member	Full name and signature of witness
-----------------------------------	------------------------------------

Please return this form to your Block or Street Leader or drop off at 49 Scott Road, Observatory. These forms can also be delivered to the OBSID office at 41 Station Road or handed in at the Library in Station Road and advise: 082 926 1220. You can also fax the completed form to 021 448 2824 or scan and email it to james@observ.org. Membership is renewed on a yearly basis and members will receive an ONW Photo ID card to identify themselves when on patrol.

ONW DATA MANAGER - 2015

Figures 10 and 11: Patrol preferences and membership form attached to the flyer in figure 9.

At the heart of 21st century discourses are questions of whose lives may matter more than others. While the debates themselves are not new, the #hashtags they are linked to and the media through which concerns around moralities of living together are expressed allow for debates to reach large numbers of people in accelerated, individualised and accessible ways. The new media have been powerful in (re)igniting debates and (re)activating demands for social change. Yet, the focus of ubiquitous #hashtags on binary positions may render it easy to neglect their nuances and facets. In recognition of grey-zones, contradictions and ambiguities, this ethnography focuses on a suburb of Cape Town, Observatory, and its recently revived Neighbourhood Watch as an urban renewal project and attempt to decrease notions of vulnerability to crime and violence. In Observatory – considered to be liberal and bohemian by its inhabitants – the framing of topics within the Neighbourhood Watch group often take on an abstract, intellectualised form. Nevertheless, the group with its rather clashing ideals is grounded in and fuelled by recycled crime stories as well as snapshots of suspected criminals that continue to reappear via various social media channels. Individual experiences, stories and inner conflicts of local Neighbourhood Watch members are at the centre of this exploratory engagement with how fear becomes embodied, everyday practice and the ways in which desires for relationality and spatial exclusivity become entangled in a place where every life matters only in principle.

LEAH DAVINA JUNCK is a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town and researcher at the Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division (HEARD), University of KwaZulu-Natal.



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